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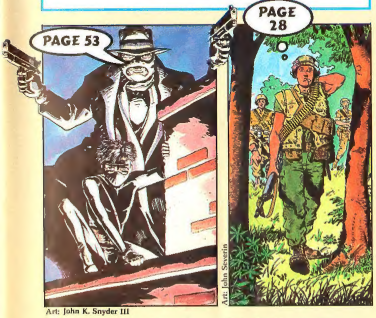

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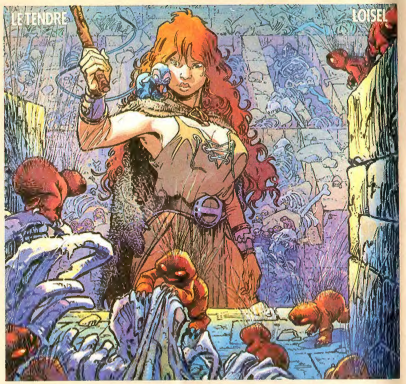

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WORD BALLOONS

Ragtime in Four-Color

Somehow, it was easier to sleep each night because Superman and Batman knew each other. Undoubtedly, while you and I and our pals snoozed, they were out making a concerted effort to keep the world safe for democracy, fighting for truth, justice, the American way and stuff like that.

Yes, Superman and Batman were ol' chums. And so were Green Lantern and the Flash and Green Arrow. And Nick Fury and Captain America and Iron Man. They knew each other. They were friends. They may have double-dated.

That's always been one of the most endearing aspects of comic book continuity. Somehow or another, most heroes got to meet—be it in crossovers, imaginary stories or deluxe specials. So, it becomes easy, after a while, to construct a case for a confederacy of heroes—not a Justice League or an Avengers but a band of brothers, fighting the good fight separately and sometimes together. If one of them was real, so must they all be real, because they *had* met each other.

Then, throw in a variety of novels and movies, as well as the seminal works of SF writer Philip Jose Farmer (who postulates that most heroes are also *related*). Add a little E.L. Doctorow *Ragtime* and George MacDonald Fraser *Flashman* for inspiration. Taking all comics stories as gospel, a heroic tapestry emerges.

Batman, after all, has met up with The Shadow who, in turn, has rendezvoused with Doc Savage. Batman has also encountered—to name two extremes—Jerry Lewis and Sherlock Holmes. Spider-Man has teamed up with the Transformers and *Saturday Night Live*'s Not-Ready-for-Prime-Time Players. The Fantastic Four have battled Godzilla, a close personal friend/enemy of Ghidrah and Mothra. There are many other examples, some just as bizarre.

Most of these team-ups benefit from inter-company convenience. It's child's play to team *Magnum, P.I.* with *Murder She Wrote*'s Jessica Fletcher or *Ironside* with Sarge or *Marcus Welby, M.D.* with *Owen Marshall, Counselor-at-Law*—after all, Universal TV produced them all, often with the same creative teams. With *Secret Wars, Crisis on Infinite Earths, Total Eclipse* and *Crossroads*, it's a given that almost all super folks at Marvel, DC, Eclipse and First have met. The few inter-company team-ups are more interesting—*Spider-Man vs. Superman, Batman vs. the Hulk*—and the ones that *didn't* end up happening (Batman & Jon Sable, Batman & Judge Dredd, Swamp Thing & Mr. Monster) are fascinating to ponder.

All of these musings come to a head now that we have firm, concrete, photographic *proof* that just about every cartoon character knows each other, too—as shown in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, the live-action/animation epic directed by Robert Zemeckis (see STARLOG #134) with animation supervised by Richard Williams (see page 33). This landmark film unveils some hitherto unknown facts. Hollywood in the 1940s—and specifically, Toontown, that animated burb where all the cartoon stars live—really was *Ragtime* for cartoon characters. There we see that Woody Woodpecker, Betty Boop and Droopy, ambassadors from the Walter Lantz, Max & Dave Fleischer and Tex Avery universes, rubbed elbows with Warner Bros.' Daffy Duck & Yosemite Sam and Disney's Donald Duck & Dumbo.

These characters interact with real private eye Bob Hoskins so, they, too, must be real—and maybe we can prove it. We know, from the movie, that Bugs Bunny knows Mickey Mouse. And we know that The Shadow and Sherlock Holmes know Batman. And Batman and Superman, that *World's Finest* pair, are pals. Years ago, Superman battled Muhammad Ali and he undertook that historic special mission for President John F. Kennedy. Here's where the missing link *must* fit—the link that comics scientists are looking for, the one between "reality" and comics and cartoons, the one that proves that Superman who knew JFK also knows Bugs Bunny and all is right with the world.

Superman, you see, once teamed up with the Nestle Quik Bunny. This post-*Crisis* tale must be true, it's drawn by Carmine Infantino and Dick Giordano. So, Superman *does* know Quik Bunny—and if as we here at COMICS SCENE suspect, Quik is Bugs' younger, faster brother, it all becomes clear. The Man of Steel and that wascally wabbit are pals. Now, it's *so* much easier to sleep at night.

—David McDonnell/Editor

COMICS SCENE RETURNS in the near future with further forays with The Man of Steel, that guy from Krypton known as **Superman**. Then, expect even more insider info on the animated adventure of **Who Framed Roger Rabbit?** And there'll be more commentary from **Richard Williams** and **Alan Moore**. Not to mention our oft-delayed look at **The Wizard of Id** movie. Really! **COMICS SCENE #5 on sale circa September 22, 1988.**

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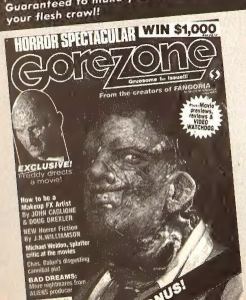
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COMICS SCENE

Baby, This is the Greatest!

Art: Jack Davis

Honeymooners Art: Copyright 1987, 1988 Triad Publications

Did you ever think the day would come when you would see comic books advertised on latenight TV? Well, that day is almost here. But it won't be *Superman* or even *Watchmen* that will become the history-making title. Nope, the honor belongs to Triad Publications' *The Honeymooners*. According to co-publisher Ron Merians, plans are in the works to advertise back-issue sets of their highly successful comic during *Honeymooner* reruns.

Triad has some new projects in the works, but the adventures of Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton are clearly their top priority, with Merians and his production team capturing much of the original TV show's charm and humor.

While the TV series was noted for its sparse sets, the comic-book format has opened up a wealth of opportunities for taking Ralph, Ed, Alice and Trixie to exotic and far-out locations. So far, they've visited Hollywood, watched wrestling matches, met men from Mars, and even attended a comic convention. "We've got some even better stories coming up," says Merians. "There's one called 'The Phantom of the Sewer,' and it's a great take-off on 'The Phantom of the Opera,' right down to having the mask on our cover. We're also going to try and put Ralph and Ed into a 1950s Brooklyn Dodger game. We'll see them on one of their bowling nights. Another is about the Alan Freed Rock & Roll Show at the Brooklyn Paramount—I mean, there's no reason why Kramden, Norton, Alice and Trixie weren't there!"

Triad picked up the *Honeymooners* series from Lodestone with issue #2. According to Merians, Lodestone didn't have the resources to put out a monthly *'Mooners*. "I had heard about the book, and I had known Jackie Gleason from past dealings," says Merians. "The comic caught my eye to the point where I was willing to pursue it." Unfortunately for Merians, Gleason was on his death bed, and negotiations for the property proved difficult. "It's not an easy thing to get a consummate performer like Gleason to negotiate with someone to take the tradition of the *Honeymooners* on for years to come, when the guy was down to his last few days on Earth," says Merians.

"We took great pains to present scripts and artwork to assure him that the license would be handled in the tradition of the series."

Merians obtained the go-ahead, and the first thing he did was sign on the book's original artist, Vince Musacchia, making him a partner in the business. To date, Triad has published nine issues, in a proposed initial series of 24. In addition to the stories, each issue has insightful interviews with series stars such as Audrey Meadows and Art Carney.

Merians has also been able to persuade some of the biggest names in comics to work for him, using their love for the show as a key inducement.

"I gently persuaded Jack Davis to do a wrap-around cover for me. Jack Davis hasn't done a wrap-around cover in more than 20 years, but he's a *Honeymooners* fan! Most people agree to work on the book because they feel they owe something to Gleason for the joy he gave them over the years."

The Davis cover will be on the July issue, and Merians is pulling out all the stops for this one. "We've got a great 24-page story with Ralph and the gang at Coney Island; Nathan's Hot Dogs, the Steeplechase and parachute jump, the works! Then, we have an interview with Cyndi Lauper, who is a huge *Honeymooners* fan, and 16 more pages are going to be rendered in half-tone, for our first 'Lost Episode.' It's a wonderful piece of memorabilia and should be the standout issue of the first twelve."

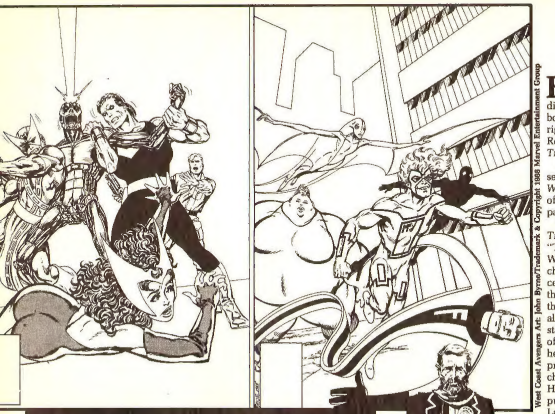
Other top talent Merians says he is going after includes Mort Drucker and Will Eisner. Ron Merians also hopes to publish a magazine format *Honeymooners* one-shot. "We would have big pages, different stories, puzzles, games, two pages of Norton's favorite sandwiches and how to keep them from getting soggy, a cut-out of Ralph's bus driver badge, Alice's recipes—I mean, how in heaven's name did they keep this guy fat when they had no money?"

—Richard Gilbert

And away we go! Jack Davis' love for the *Honeymooners* was the main reason he agreed to do this special wrap-around cover.

Now that Ralph has made Raccoon of the Year, he may be Broadway bound with "The Phantom of the Sewer."

Art: Vince Musacchia



West Coast Avengers Art: John Byrne/Trademark & Copyright 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group

Byrne to Coast

Leaving Metropolis, writer/artist John Byrne is slipping on some sunglasses as he heads for the Californian beaches, taking the *West Coast Avengers* with him! Starting with issue #42, Byrne will be chronicling their adventures, although Mike Machlan will remain as inker with Howard Mackie editing the book. The team's membership will be in for the inevitable shake-up when their "Vision Quest" begins, and wait until you see the Great Lakes Avengers in action.

Future of the Four

Steve Englehart has a long-term plan for the *Fantastic Four*. "I know where the Johnny-Crystal, Johnny-Alicia and Ben-Sharon relationships are going to end up. Along the way, I've got several interesting twists involved—there's a great deal left to be done with their interpersonal relationships!"

Although Crystal will be leaving the FF for about six months, there are no other immediate changes planned in the group's lineup.

"We knew taking Reed and Sue Richards out of the group would cause a *lot* of controversy, but the current changes were less in removing people than in actively replacing them—all of them have left the group at times," Englehart explains.

"Sales have responded quite favorably. Giving Ben a chance to be the boss seemed like a concept that was long overdue, as was giving Ben a girl friend he could relate to. There were more people who had trouble believing that Alicia actively fell in love with Johnny after all those years of being in love with Ben, than have trouble believing in the FF without Reed and Sue.

"But Reed and Sue are reappearing in the Marvel Universe, first in *Silver Surfer*. After that, they'll be appearing in *The Avengers* for about six months. According to Walt Simonson, they don't actually join the group—they're just involved in the same way that Ben was involved with the *West Coast Avengers*. So, it'll be next spring before we see Reed and Sue returning to the FF," the writer says.

In the meantime, Englehart is following the Beyonder storyline with one-issue tales spotlighting the individual team members. Issue #320 features the new Thing battling the new Hulk, #321 sees Ms. Marvel and the She-Hulk squaring off. A solo Human Torch yarn lights up the next issue. Then, Englehart promises a new Frightful Four, with the Inhumans to follow, all in the future of the *Fantastic Four*.

—*Kim Howard Johnson*

Prisoner Art: Dean Mottet/Copyright 1988 DC Comics Inc.

He's Number Six, But He's Trying Harder

Twenty years after Number Six escaped from the Village, a young woman discovers the enigmatic town's ruins, drawing the spy with no name back to the remains of his gilded cage. But has he now become the Village's warden or is he once again *The Prisoner*? Dean (Mr. X) Motter and Mark Askwith come in from the cold with the complete four-part, Prestige Format story for DC Comics. Be seeing you.

Darrigo on Bravado

He's tough, he's cynical, he's violent, and he has quite a dirty background as a cop and a bodyguard," says writer Dave Darrigo of his latest project for Renegade Press, *Tony Bravado: Troubleshooter*.

Like his previous Renegade series, the critically acclaimed *Wordsmith*, *Tony Bravado* started off as a novel conceived for the paperback book market.

"It was going to be called *Troubleshooter*," Darrigo says. "The name was Tony Bernardi. When I developed it for comics, I changed it to Bravado. The concept originated in my interest in the history of Hugh Hefner and the *Playboy* empire. I thought of all the hotels and clubs that he started and I wondered what kind of security problems and scandals he faced. I wanted to have a private eye or troubleshooter character who worked for a Hefner figure, so I created the publisher businessman named Lance Palmer and a *Playboy* type of empire around him known as Eden."

Tony Bravado's unusual background—he was born in New York City, but raised in Italy, where he joined the Italian police force, rapidly rising from detective to counter-terrorist specialist during the time of the Red Brigades problem—is something Darrigo won't reveal for several issues.

"The first issue is a day-in-the-life kind of story," he explains. "It's a simple introduction into the Bravado character and we touch on parts of his background. I'm trying for a Jon Sable approach here. I just want to introduce the character and his world and then I'll get into his origin in a detailed way in later issues."

Planned as a regular bi-monthly black and white title, the first issue of *Tony Bravado: Troubleshooter* is due this month. It will be drawn by Steve LeBlanc, who was responsible for the "Pulp Pin-Up" pages in *Wordsmith*. Darrigo says that most issues will feature self-contained stories, although a two-parter is scheduled to begin in the second issue.

"It's called 'The Point of No Return,'" Darrigo says. "Bravado takes on a group of bikers called the Cowboys in Mexico City. They're extorting the Eden Club there. What complicates matters is that Lance Palmer is on a book tour through the U.S. to promote his autobiography. While Bravado is in Mexico City, there is an assassination of another erotic magazine publisher and Palmer starts to fear for his own life. In a

panic, he tries to recall Bravado from Mexico City, but Bravado is heavily involved in taking care of the bikers and he disobeys the recall order and comes close to losing his job."

Other characters will include Ron Curtis, Eden's by-the-book security chief and Patricia Vernon, Palmer's executive assistant and Bravado's ex-lover. Darrigo hopes that his series will help revive a neglected comics genre.

"The *Bravado* series comes from my background as a mystery-detective reader and writer," he says. "I've always been amazed that of all the genres in comics that have gone into extinction, crime comics was one of them."

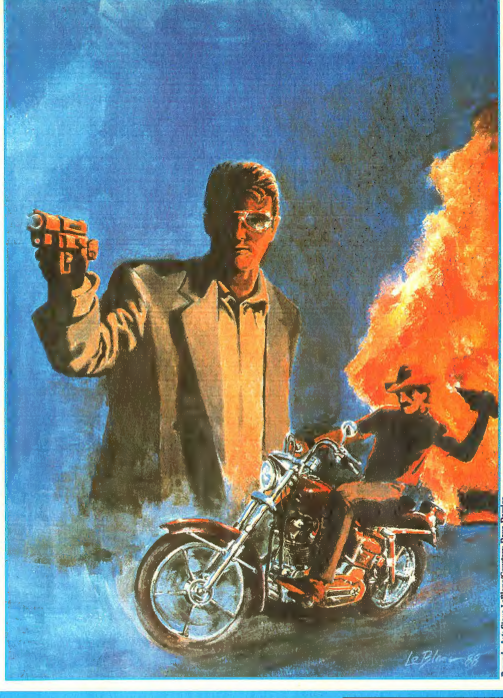
Although Darrigo plans for *Tony Bravado* to be less experimental and more commercial than *Wordsmith*, it will feature a similarly true-to-life art style.

"It's very hard to find artists who like to draw realistic stories," he points out. "By that I mean that comic artists don't necessarily like to draw unrealistically, but they don't like to draw the natural three-dimensional things they see outside their window. There always has to be a fantastic element to it. Fortunately, Steve LeBlanc, and Louis Paradis, the inker, are both of the same mindset. They both like to draw in a naturalistic way."

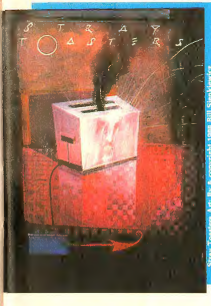
Darrigo credits a number of influences on *Tony Bravado*, from European private eye comic heroes like Archie Cash and Bruno Brazil, to American TV shows like *Miami Vice*, as well as John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee novels. The European feel, Darrigo warns, includes a realistic handling of the hedonistic world of Tony Bravado.

"There's a lot of nudity in it. Tony gets laid a lot," Dave Darrigo announces, "but there's no explicit sex."

—Will Murray



Bravado Art: Steve LeBlanc/Courtesy Dave Darrigo



Stray Toasters #1 © copyright Steve Bill Sienkiewicz

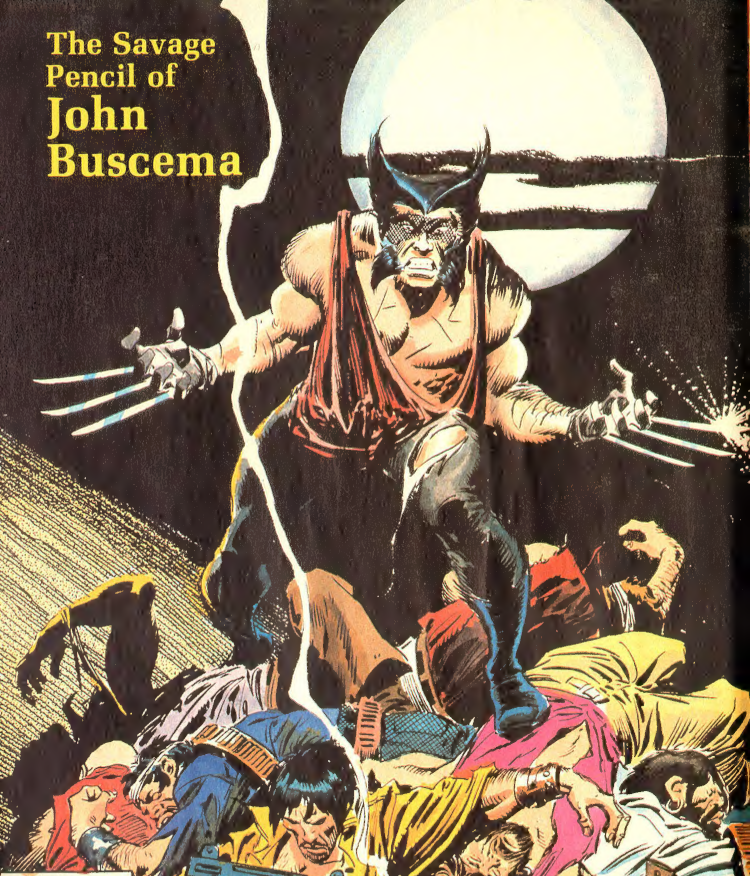
Pop & Fresh Id

"*Stray Toasters* is kind of like a metaphor for many things people want or need," explains editor D.G. (Dan) Chichester (CSQ #2) of the Epic project that will unleash Bill Sienkiewicz as the author of his own unique images. And with Sienkiewicz's track record, Chichester promises it won't be "your standard hoohah action type of" comic. "We are in a futuristic city, much like the one in *Blade Runner*—the ambiance, that very dark tone—and what's going on in this city is a bunch of strange violent crimes. Small children are being abducted and turning up dead, drained of all their bodily fluids; a series of single women are being killed in these strange electronic, mechanical ways.

"A criminal psychologist named Egon Rustermagik, who could be part criminal, part psychologist or both, is investigating" adds Chichester, "Egon is not sane himself. He sees pink elephants when he's drunk, which is most of the time, and he fires at them, killing the upstairs neighbors' cat. There is a *lot* of black humor. I think *Stray Toasters* is going to give people a whole new perception of Bill Sienkiewicz as a writer."

—Eddie Berganza

The Savage Pencil of John Buscema



While Wolverine plows through piles of pirates, John Buscema will be making his way through Chris Claremont's tightly plotted scripts.

After battling Conan for 15 years, the artist is tackling a new opponent, the modern-day barbarian known as Wolverine.

By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

Wolverine is sort of a miniature Conan. He's that type of almost barbaric, self-made character. Wolverine is as much an outsider coming into a situation as Conan was," says John Buscema, now pencilling the solo adventures of the fearsome X-Man. "The settings tend to be similar, too—the scenes at night, the skulking around. Conan would ride into town and go into the local tavern, Wolverine hits the local saloon for the same reasons, things like that."

Writing the Wolverine solo series is, of course, Chris Claremont (CSQ #1, #2), who has been scripting the history of Logan and his mutant teammates for more than a decade. Although Buscema has worked with Claremont previously, notably on the *Magik* mini-series, this is their first extended project together. Claremont has said that *Wolverine* is more high adventure than it is superhero action, and Buscema agrees.

"Absolutely. I don't know what to compare it with, but it has crime lords and things like that," the artist notes. "So far, I haven't come across any characters who classify as super-villains. The only guy with super-powers is Wolverine. Most of it involves gangsters and pirates. I wouldn't call the book superhero."

One of the comparisons Claremont makes is to the late Milton Caniff's classic *Terry and the Pirates*, particularly in the early days of that strip when the action centered in the Orient. "There might be *some* similarity with *Terry*," Buscema admits, "but I'm not sure because I'm not familiar with that strip—which sounds funny to say. I was never interested in that strip as a kid; I was reading *Tarzan*, *Prince Valiant* and *Flash Gordon*. But it probably does have a feel of that sort."

With *Wolverine*, Buscema says he's illustrating a kind of modern Conan.

The lack of humor in superhero comics distresses Buscema. However, Wolverine isn't likely to practice stand-up comedy.

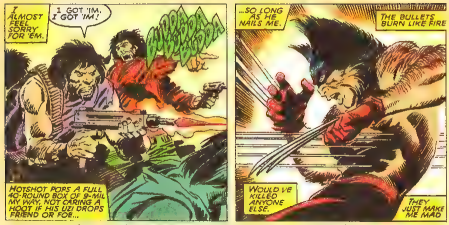
Claremont would certainly be pleased with the writing company Buscema puts him in, comparing the mutant scribe with the originator and one of the early architects of the Marvel Universe. "After some of the other writers I've worked with, working with Chris is a *pleasure*," Buscema says. "I worked with Roy Thomas and Stan Lee, and they would give me great plots. But some of the others since then . . . It was hard to get into the plots, and I was losing interest.

"When I started working on *Wolverine*, the first plot Chris gave me, it was like old times. I was interested in what I was doing and having a ball," Buscema explains.

Though Buscema says he prefers that a writer give him a fairly loose plot, with leeway for the artist to make choices, so far, Claremont has handed him much tighter stories and that's just fine with him. "Chris is giving me fairly tight plots right now, as I'm getting used to the character and the situations," Buscema says. "As I get to know him, I'm sure Chris will give me more leeway.

"Before getting this assignment, I was *never* familiar with Wolverine. I get the books every month from Marvel, but I don't really read them. I would flip through, and I would see this guy with the horned hairdo—he looked interesting, I'll admit. Then suddenly, I was *working* on something with him. It's difficult to explain how I feel about working on this title because it's all so new. But that newness is exciting."

Buscema expects to stick with *Wolverine* for quite awhile, for reasons similar to the ones that kept him drawing a certain Cimmerian for so long. "I always take myself back to Conan. I had that character down pat," he recalls. "I knew exactly how he would react to situations. I loved Conan and I hated giving it up. I think someday I'll feel the same way about Wolverine. I'm gonna get to know him."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I GOT 'IM. I GOT 'IM!
HOTSHOT POPS A FULL 40-ROUND BOX OF 9-MIL MY WAY, NOT CARING A HOOT IF HIS UZI DROPS FRIEND OR FOE...
SO LONG AS HE NAILS ME.
THE BULLETS BURN LIKE FIRE
WOULD'VE KILLED ANYONE ELSE.
THEY JUST MAKE THE MAD

The absence of costumed super-villains lured Buscema to Wolverine's lair.

While John Buscema's work has always been recognizable as his own, there has been a noticeable change in it since the movie adaptations (*Hercules*, *Sinbad* and *The Vikings*) he did for Dell in the 1950s and '60s.

"Most of my influence today, since I started at Marvel in the '60s, is Jack Kirby," Buscema notes. "Kirby, as far as I'm concerned, has *no* peers in superhero stuff. I hate the guy's guts because he's *so damn good*. I'm always striving to meet his standards, and I fall far short. One of the things that Kirby taught me is that for superhero stuff, you must distort. I always drew anatomically correctly; now, I distort for effect. Not as much as Kirby does, but I do.

"I grew up on Hal Foster and Alex Raymond, some Burne Hogarth," he observes. "Some have seen the Foster influence there. I don't, but if it's there, OK. But once I started working at Marvel, I had to get away from that."

Buscema has worked with a number of the industry's best inkers through the years, including Joe Sinnott, Tony deZuniga, Tom Palmer and the late George Klein. Has he ever altered his pencils to suit the assigned inker?

"The inker makes no difference to me now in my working method. At one time, it did, and I was very aware of who was going to ink a story," Buscema says. "But I've found over the years that no matter what I did, the inker is going to do what he wants. There's only one guy in all these years who has ever inked a story the way I pencilled it: my brother Sal.

"I'm not criticizing the inkers," Buscema is quick to add. "They're professionals and they turn out a terrific job. But when they get my work, I don't recognize it when they finish. I have to look at it twice to realize it's mine. This is the nature of the business. I have to accept it. The ideal situation would be to ink it myself, but I always feel I fall short of what I would like to do when I ink. It's because I don't do it often enough; inking is something you must practice. I would love to ink my own stuff, but I think it would take at least a half-dozen issues before I would be back in the groove and doing what I think is suitable."

About two years ago, Buscema returned to a scene of past glory, *The Avengers*. He recently acquired a new writer on that title, fellow artist Walt Simonson (CSQ #3). Is working with a writer who is also an artist any different?

"I haven't found working with an artist/writer like Walt to be any different from working with anyone else," Buscema says.

"Walt *has* been giving me looser plots than most writers today. When I worked with Stan, he would call me on the phone, we would discuss the story and he would send me a couple of paragraphs of plot, and then I pencilled a 22-page book," Buscema recalls. "Today, most writers give you a 13- or 14-page synopsis for a 22-page book. Walt is giving me about *two* pages of plot outline for each book. He leaves a great many things up to me, and I appreciate that. I like having some input, rather than having the writer put me in a straitjacket. One of the reasons I feel that way is because if something should come up, if I think of a good idea that might improve the story, I won't use it, because the writer has been very specific. I can't elaborate on his work because I don't have enough room to move. Many writers give me this problem, but Walt has given me a lot of leeway."

Another ingredient Buscema says he finds missing from today's superhero comics is a leavening of humor. "One of the things I like to do is put a little humor into the books. I haven't done it in years. So many of the books are so damn serious these days. Some of the funniest lines I've ever seen in a comic book were the stuff that Stan used to write for characters like the Thing or Volstagg in *Thor*."

Like many prolific artists, Buscema is hard-pressed to point to favorite past work. "The books I did that stick out in my mind now, are a couple of issues of *Silver Surfer*—the one with Thor [#4, inked by his brother Sal] and the one that introduced Mephisto [#3]. I enjoyed doing the black-and-white *Conan* more than the color version, because I could do more, we were less restricted," John Buscema says. "They're the ones I'm proud of and I'm not ashamed to say I did." ■

All Art: John Buscema/Al Williamson

Prior to his assignment with Wolverine, John Buscema admits he knew very little about the Canadian X-Man.

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BUT METRON'S FINDINGS, WHICH I'VE POURED OVER FOR THE LAST WEEK, HAVE PUT AN END TO THAT DREAM. I NOW FACE A MENACE BEYOND MY POWER TO CONFRONT.
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AGES, DARK SEID THE SCHEMER NEEDS HELP.

The Anti-Life of the Party

Gazing into the void, Jim Starlin finds an evil entity, a score of superheroes and a pantheon of New Gods gazing into him.

By BARRY DUTTER

Jim Starlin is about to embark on a *Cosmic Odyssey*. His latest DC mini-series, a four-issue prestige format book which debuts this summer, *Cosmic Odyssey* is an epic tale that takes some of DC's greatest heroes on a mission from Earth to the home of the legendary New Gods, Apokolips . . . and beyond.

The mini-series also marks Starlin's return to the type of "cosmic," galactic adventure for which he is best known. In the mid-70s, he rose to prominence through his classic work on Marvel's *Warlock* and their original *Captain Marvel*, before going on to chart the star-spanning saga of *Dreadstar* in the '80s.

Starlin's *Cosmic Odyssey* centers on the Anti-Life Equation, that mysterious formula that forever eluded Darkseid in Jack Kirby's *New Gods* series. Now, readers will learn that the Anti-Life Equation is not what they thought it was.

"It is neither a theory nor an equation," Starlin states. "What it is is an actual trans-dimensional entity which has been trying to enter our reality for centuries. It succeeded once before, which is why the New Gods need to use the Boom Tubes to get from New Genesis and Apokolips to Earth. They're not in our dimension."

Cosmic Odyssey begins with a major discovery by Metron of the New Gods. "He finally discovers the Anti-Life Equation," notes Starlin, "and has his mind destroyed.

"Four aspects of the Anti-Life Equation

I'M GOING TO TAKE MORE THAN YOU'VE GOT TO KILL OFF THAT GUY, PAL.
DARKSEID JUST BS DOING HIS DIRTY WORK.
IMAGINE BEING ASSIGNED SUCH PITIFUL GODS SOLDIERS! WHAT AN ASSIGNMENT AS THIS

Initially hesitant, Starlin found his home amongst the stars once again, pitting Superman, Lightray and many other heroes against the Anti-Life Equation entities.

are released into our universe. Darkseid takes notice of this and realizes that his stormtroopers aren't up to the task of taking on the Anti-Life Equation entities. So, he finds a way to get Earth's superheroes involved."

The Anti-Life Equation wants to enter our dimension for the purpose of "new experiences, new worlds to conquer. It wants to expand its realm.

"But, it can't enter our dimension the way it is," Starlin continues. "It is an anti-matter being. The only way it can enter our dimension is to destroy the Milky Way galaxy. To do this, it sends four different aspects of itself to destroy four different systems: Rann, Earth, Thanagar and X'anshi, which was a planet of cannibals from Green Lantern.

"The Anti-Life Equation plans to throw off the gravitational balance of the galaxy. When the Milky Way collapses, this would create enough of a catastrophic change that it would enable the Anti-Life Equation to enter our dimension."

Among the New Gods featured in *Cosmic Odyssey* are Highfather, Lightray, Orion and Forager. Superheroes toplining the book include: Superman, Batman, J'onn J'onzz, the Demon, the John Stewart Green Lantern and Starfire from the Teen Titans.

"There's also another DC character who keeps popping up," Starlin adds, "but we don't find out who he is until the fourth issue. I don't want to tell who it is."

How did he choose which heroes would appear in *Cosmic Odyssey*? "We started off with the New Gods. I was writing Batman, so I threw him in. Superman seemed like a natural choice," Starlin explains. "I wanted to use Wonder Woman, but she was unavailable, so that's why Starfire is there. J'onn J'onzz I picked just because I like him. I wanted Guy Gardner, but they're doing all sorts of changes to him, so I got John Stewart instead."

Originally, Starlin thought about drawing *Cosmic Odyssey* himself. "But then, I realized this wouldn't be possible because there wasn't enough time. Mike Mignola was suggested as the artist, and this was fine with me, since I really like his stuff.

"The only trepidations I had were with Carlos Garzon inking. He had inked Mike on *World of Krypton*, and I wasn't sure that was the right look for this book. But on *World of Krypton*, Mike had only done

THE HORROR IS THE HORROR IS THE FUNERAL NIGHTMARES.
IT'S THE ONLY FEASIBLE THING TO DO
BUT THEN, IN MIND'S EYE PLANETS DO THEIR BODIES' HANGING FROM HOOKS LIKE SIDES OF BEEF.
All Cosmic Odyssey Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1988 DC Comics Inc.

Since Starlin is currently scripting *Batman*, it only seemed natural to involve the Dark Knight in the *Cosmic Odyssey*.

When Guy Gardner and Wonder Woman were unable to heed the Highfather's summons, Starlin called on John Stewart and Starfire.

WE NEEDED TO GATHER THE SIX OF YOU AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.
BUT YOU AND SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS HAVE SECRET IDENTITIES. THIS SEEMED THE EASIEST WAY...
...TO OVERCOME THAT OBSTACLE.

layouts, while on *Cosmic Odyssey*, he would be doing full pencils, so I thought it might work.

"Well, it turns out that all doubts I had have long faded. It's going to be a good-looking book."

Still, Starlin admits he had a few doubts about his own involvement. When he was first approached to do *Cosmic Odyssey*, he confesses he was a little reluctant. "I was hesitant because I had done [cosmic-type stories] before. It was going back to my *Captain Marvel* days. Actually, Darkseid was my original inspiration for Thanos."

But once he started plotting *Cosmic Odyssey*, Starlin confesses he found he enjoyed returning to work in an outer-space setting. In fact, he liked it so much, he plans to stay in that cosmic realm.

"I'm writing a new *New Gods* series which will pick up *directly* after *Cosmic Odyssey* ends. I'm contracted to do 12 issues. This will be a follow-up series drawn by Paris Cullins."

How does Starlin think he can make *New Gods* work this time when two previous attempts failed?

"Well, I don't think the first attempt failed, to tell you the truth," he replies. "I understand that many books [in the early '70s] were being cancelled for reasons other than economics. It was a crazy time over at DC.

"Jack Kirby's books were never given a chance. At that time, there was no direct sales market. Those books were mostly cancelled by their seventh issue, which wasn't enough time for them to have gotten sales figures in on the first."

Starlin says he has no idea why the first

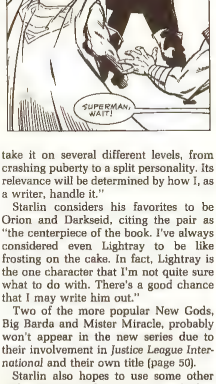
***Cosmic Odyssey*'s end will signal a new age for the *New Gods*.**

revival, *Return of the New Gods*, written by Gerry Conway and drawn by the late Don Newton, was axed. "I didn't read it at the time, and I haven't read it since. I've been told to ignore it [by the editor]."

As for his own revival, Starlin feels there are several factors which may contribute to its success. "With the direct market now, we've got a chance to keep it running longer than it did before. I think there are a number of folks out there who would like to see *New Gods* again. We'll get a better idea when *Cosmic Odyssey* comes out, because most of its sales will funnel over into the regular book."

Although the New Gods were created for an early '70s audience, Starlin believes the characters still hold the same appeal to today's fans. "I think the New Gods would be as relevant today as when Jack created them. Jack did timeless characters.

"The conflict boiling within Orion is as relevant today as it was then. You can

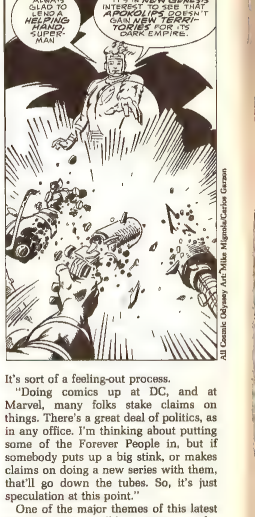


take it on several different levels, from crashing puberty to a split personality. Its relevance will be determined by how I, as a writer, handle it."

Starlin considers his favorites to be Orion and Darkseid, citing the pair as "the centerpiece of the book. I've always considered even Lightray to be like frosting on the cake. In fact, Lightray is the one character that I'm not quite sure what to do with. There's a good chance that I may write him out."

Two of the more popular New Gods, Big Barda and Mister Miracle, probably won't appear in the new series due to their involvement in *Justice League International* and their own title (page 50).

Starlin also hopes to use some other Kirby creations, the *Forever People*, but this depends on DC editor Mike Carlin. "There are no definite plans on that yet.


ALWAYS GLAD TO SEE AN IDEA HELPING FIND SUPER-MAN
IT'S AN NEW GENESIS' INTEREST TO SEE WHAT APOKOLIPS' CURRENT GUN-NEY'S ARE-TOOBES FOR ITS DARK EMPIRE.

All Cosmic Odyssey Art: Mike Mignola/Carlos Garzon

It's sort of a feeling-out process.

"Doing comics up at DC, and at Marvel, many folks stake claims on things. There's a great deal of politics, as in any office. I'm thinking about putting some of the Forever People in, but if somebody puts up a big stink, or makes claims on doing a new series with them, that'll go down the tubes. So, it's just speculation at this point."

One of the major themes of this latest *New Gods* series will be Orion's quest for his identity. "Orion is trying to find out where he belongs. I see Orion differently than the other New Gods. The other Gods are creatures of predestination. They know what they are, they know what they have to do.

"Highfather is destined to rule New Genesis, and he knows what he has to do. Darkseid realizes his destiny is to be this ultimate villain. On the other hand, Orion has *no* clear-cut role to play.

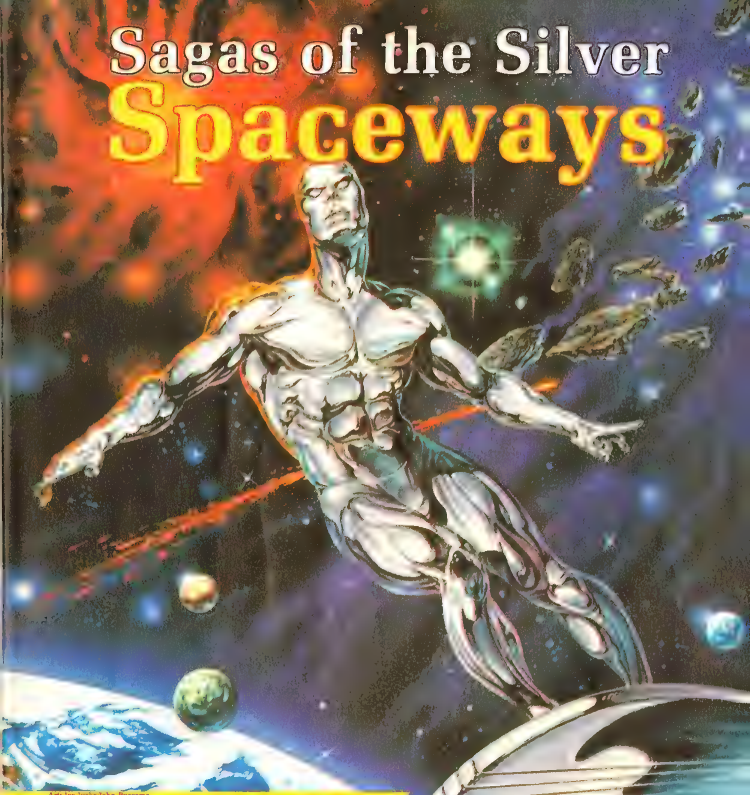
"So, I'm going to be exploring that, and exploring the fact that he's different. He's unhappy with what he is, and not able to change all that easily."

Fans may be wondering how the New Gods can continue at all when Jack Kirby basically finished off the series in his *Hunger Dogs* graphic novel. Starlin has found a way around this situation by having the new series take place between the last issue of the original title and *The Hunger Dogs*. (The Conway-Newton stories aren't considered part of the continuity.) "We're filling in the space," Starlin says. "The new stuff will be sandwiched between Jack's storyline."

Many changes occurred between the first *New Gods* comic and the graphic novel, and Starlin hopes to show why.

(continued on page 65)

Sagas of the Silver Spaceways



Art: Joe Jusko/John Buscema

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Beyond the Earth and out into the cosmos, Steve Englehart scripts the adventures of the Silver Surfer.

"I still think the Lee-Buscema series was a classic," admits Englehart, who now has to avoid continuity quirks with that team's latest effort.

Art: John Buscema

Facing "Judgment"

It has been nearly two decades since they last worked on the cosmic rider of the spacewaves, but like performers returning to the show that they're best known for, Stan Lee and John Buscema have reunited for just one more Silver Surfer project. However, with *Judgment Day* upon them, they have to admit that teaming again for this graphic novel after so long a time wasn't the experience that either of them expected.

In the first place, "this is really John Buscema's story," Lee explains. "It all takes place in space, and it involves the Surfer and Nova caught in this very major confrontation between Mephisto and Galactus. It's an interesting concept. John made up this very brilliant story and he drew it. Then, it was given to me to write.

"So, it's a different situation from those original 17 issues where I had come up with the story myself, then discussed it with John and he laid it out while I wrote it. But I think as far as quality goes, it will certainly measure up to the others."

For his own part, Buscema admits, "Returning to the Silver Surfer after about 20 years was *not* as satisfying as I thought it would be. I never really was that crazy about the Surfer, though. The character I loved was Mephisto. He was *much* more interesting. You could do a lot with Mephisto, but not with the

And, somewhere in the deep vastness of outer space, an incredible figure hurtles thru the cosmos! A being whom we shall call the Silver Surfer for want of a better name!

That was how the Silver Surfer was introduced to the world in 1965—a humble beginning for what would be one of the most admired characters in comics.

And if Steve Englehart has his way, the Surfer will be soaring the spaceways every month for a long time to come.

It has been years since the Surfer's original series, but the book's author is making the most of the opportunity to write the character who had traditionally been "reserved" for Stan Lee.

"When I came back to Marvel in 1984, I was shown a list of characters they wanted to do books about," Englehart explains. "The Silver Surfer was prominent on that list. I had been at Marvel when Stan was editor, and I knew he wanted to write the character himself. But they told me that Stan hadn't been able to do the character for quite a long time, and they wanted to do a Surfer book, so I told them I was interested."

Getting the character through Galactus' barrier and off the Earth was even easier than getting the Surfer away from Lee.

"At the time, Stan was doing a Surfer graphic novel with Keith Pollard which was going to get the Surfer off Earth—so, I was told to do a 12-issue limited series which would take place *before* the Surfer escaped Earth. I was working with John Buscema, and the project stalled about the same time the Lee-Pollard graphic novel was cancelled. So, Marvel told me to make it an *unlimited* series taking place *after* the Surfer gets off the Earth," Englehart says.

"Finally, they just told me to get the Surfer off the Earth myself—and I

Art: John Buscema

While Buscema has returned to the Surfer, it's the diabolical Mephisto that the artist was actually anxious to do again.

Nova and the Surfer are merely pawns in Galactus and Mephisto's epic confrontation.

Surfer. All he could do was float around on his little board."

But if returning to the hardcover album's lead character didn't quite live up to Buscema's expectations, then neither did his experimental approach to laying out the book—namely, making every page a splash page. "It was rough to tell a story that way," the artist confesses. "The transition from one scene to another was very difficult since you had no movement within the page. In some ways, it was like doing illustrations for a text piece. Almost, but not quite. I imagine that Stan, in writing it, will have to include a lot more captions to make the story work.

"Actually," the artist reconsiders, "the transitions may not be that bad. I'm still too close to it. When I'm very close to a project, I can't be objective. After it's out of my hands, I often wish I could get it back and do it over."

But once Buscema gets his latest collaboration with Lee in his hands, he will be able to *play* it over.

"I just did a videocassette with John based on our book, *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*, that will go on sale this winter," Lee explains. "You'll see a lot of John in this. We're sort of the Abbott and Costello of the art world, or maybe the Smothers Brothers of the medium."

Says Stan Lee, "Working with John Buscema is a pleasure under any circumstance."

—Daniel Dickholtz & Patrick Daniel O'Neill

brought in Marshall Rogers to start the series that we now have!

"I *didn't* like him on Earth. Like everybody else, I was bored with that particular plotline. It was good in 1968, but whenever he was used after that, people—including myself—went over the same ground. I wasn't crazy about another 12 issues of 'He's trapped on Earth and he would really like to leave.'"

Englehart says his new series has found its own way, rather than follow the original concept—or the *two* original concepts.

"It's a little difficult to say what the *original* concept is anymore. I've been told the Surfer's first appearance during the Galactus trilogy [*Fantastic Four* #48-50] was something Jack Kirby threw into the mix in addition to Lee's plot. Kirby thought anybody as heavy-duty as Galactus wouldn't be doing his own dirty work—he would have a herald.

"Although Kirby had envisioned a very cosmic, alien being, Stan felt it necessary to give the Surfer a more human connection, and came up with the Shalla Bal motif. The Surfer who was flying around with the Fantastic Four didn't even know about human emotions like love and desire—we found out later, in Stan's stories, that he *had* been in love.

"There are two original concepts of the Surfer, so I took them both and extrapolated that it had been hundreds of years since the time he was in love, and by the time he had shown up on Earth, he had forgotten about emotions.

"Personally, I felt the *alien* Surfer was more interesting, and the Surfer who was trapped on Earth and felt bad about the human condition was atypical. Once he was able to get away from Earth, I felt he would quickly revert to the alien that the original *FF* appearances indicated he was," Englehart says.

Art: Ron Lim/Joe Rubinstein

Locked between Chaos and Order, the Surfer and the Fantastic duo will "be facing villains with some scope."

plains. "If they're by Stan, they're certainly unassailably legitimate. But, since book projects take time to come to fruition, we decided *not* to tie them in too tightly with any continuity that I had going. I certainly like the Surfer I'm doing now, but I would feel very diffident about telling Stan Lee to make the character fit into something that *I'm* doing. Stan is doing his projects, following his own vision, so we're saying that they don't contradict anything in my own series."

The monthly *Silver Surfer* is in the midst of a four-parter following up events in issue #10. It seems Galactus is suffering a sort of indigestion after eating the Elders of the Universe. Even though the Big G has swallowed them, they're still alive—and they *aren't* doing him any good!

Englehart explains that Galactus had intended for Reed and Sue Richards and the Surfer to go into the black hole to retrieve the soul gems thrown in there. Galactus figures that if he can put the Elders' living souls in the gems, they can leave their bodies inside him without doing him any harm.

"It gets quite elaborate. The universe on the other side of the black hole is ruled by different gods—it has strange effects on Reed and Sue. The In-Betweener has been spawned in that universe, and he tries to take Galactus' territory from him.

"We were building toward a plotline in which Death revives Thanos, to get revenge on the people that upset her. When this was first proposed to [Marvel Editor-in-Chief] Tom DeFalco, he wasn't too sure who Thanos *was*. Once it was explained to him, he liked Thanos so much that he started saying he might co-opt him for next summer's big storyline—like this year's Evolutionary Wars. We may also do a Surfer/Thanos sequence and get it out of the way in time to bring him back next summer."

Whether Thanos returns to face the Silver Surfer or not, however, Englehart says his cosmic hero will continue to confront large-scale, epic villains.

"The Surfer should be facing villains with some scope to them—people like Thanos, Galactus or the In-Betweener. Every once in a while, I want to do something 'Earth-scale,' though I really want to keep the character *off* Earth. I've really established that he doesn't like Earth at all—he has sympathy for it, but he would rather be someplace else."

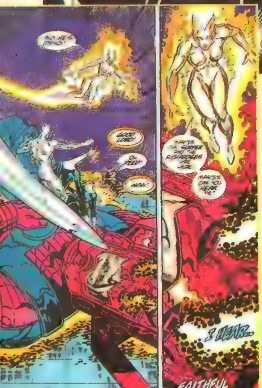
Indeed, the silver one's heart still belongs to outer space—and to a few of its inhabitants.

"I'm playing the Surfer's love life a little close to my vest, but he's certainly very interested in Nova—and, Galactus is becoming aware of it. It was stated in *(continued on page 67)*

"I still think the Lee-Buscema series was classic, but over 20 years, people got very tired of this guy whining about how bad things were—he had played that tune so much, he lost credibility and interest. The Surfer I ended up doing in this series is a logical extrapolation of what we knew—but were not necessarily seeing—of the Surfer. If they had said, 'Write 12 stories about this guy on Earth,' I would, I hope, have found 12 interesting ways to do that. But I was much happier to get him out of there and let him explore new territory."

The Silver Surfer is white-hot today—in addition to his ongoing series, he is also the subject of new projects by Lee and Buscema, and Lee and Moebius (see sidebars). However, these other Surfer sagas won't interfere in the monthly series' continuity.

"They're untold stories," Englehart ex-



Art: Ron Lim/Joe Rubinstein

Since Englehart tossed Reed & Sue out of the FF, the heralds have enlisted them to find a cure for Galactus' tummy ache.

Surfing in Style

Jean Giraud, better known as Moebius, is tired of seeing his work reproduced on slick paper in high quality hardcover albums and trade paperbacks. While most comic artists yearn to appear in the finer formats, Giraud has spent most of his career in the European system where such things are standard, which is why he's looking foward to getting his hands dirty in ordinary newsprint with a two-part *Silver Surfer* mini-series he has developed with Stan Lee.

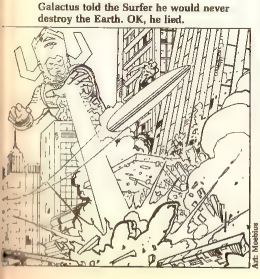
"It was a big challenge," Giraud confides. "At first, I was very scared. I didn't know what I was going to do. It took me almost 15 pages to find a style I was comfortable with. In fact, if you look at the first dozen pages, you'll see many different styles. You can tell that I hadn't yet found the look that I wanted. I even *completely* redrew several pages later, because I wasn't happy with the earlier versions, which I thought looked too dark, too 'heavy.' "

Yet even if Giraud was somewhat unsure of himself, Lee was not, developing a story that he felt would more readily accommodate the artist's style.

"This was a detailed outline of mine, and with every sentence I wrote, I was thinking of Moebius and of his particular style, trying to do it so it would be the type of thing that he would draw best," Lee notes.

"I was trying to make the story something special. In fact, I tried to give it a little more of a religious overtone than some of the others have had," the writer reveals. "It takes place just a little bit in the future—I always feel Moebius is more comfortable drawing stories that take place tomorrow rather than today—and Galactus comes to Earth. He has promised the Surfer that he would never destroy the Earth. However, the Great Hunger is upon him and he must find a way to get us to destroy ourselves. That's really the springboard for what happens next."

Galactus told the Surfer he would never destroy the Earth. OK, he lied.



Art: Moebius

With Moebius on the project, Lee wanted to create a special Surfer story in which he could play up the religious aspect of the master/herald relationship. In fact, it was the character's philosophy and spirit that drew both creators to the Silver Surfer.

Art: Moebius

But of all Marvel's characters, why choose the Surfer? What is it about the character that he can bring together this otherwise disparate writer-artist team? Why is he so intriguing?

"When we started the *Silver Surfer*, I liked him, but I wasn't aware that he was anything special until I would go on my college lectures and the audience would be shouting out questions about the Surfer." Stan Lee recalls. "I realized that he had really struck a nerve amongst the readers. Well, when you realize that your audience is interested in something you're doing, you become more interested in it too. So many readers feel that there is great depth to the Surfer and to his philosophy, that besides being an adventure story, it also has something to say. I love that type of thing myself, and the fact that the readers seem to like it has certainly made the Surfer one of my favorite characters."

But for Giraud, it was always that way. "In the 1970s, I was reading the translations of Marvel comics in France, *The Silver Surfer* was among my favorites. At the time, it was drawn by John Buscema, and it looked very beautiful. The stories were different, too, more spiritual. And when Stan approached me with the idea of doing a comic book together," Jean Giraud explains, "it seemed only natural to do the Surfer."

—*Daniel Dickholtz*

Art: Moebius

V for Moore

Part One

V for Vendetta Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1988 DC Comics Inc. Art: David Lloyd

From the mystery of "V for Vendetta" and the heroics of "Miracleman," Alan Moore looks to the future of comics.

By DANIEL DICKHOLTZ

Like Frankenstein's Monster, Alan Moore's own creations have returned angry and snarling for their master. And like that fictitious genius, Moore must also finally lay his past work to rest before he can turn his attention to the future again, a future that no longer includes mighty, sinewed superbeings or the shadowy workings of cloaked vigilantes.

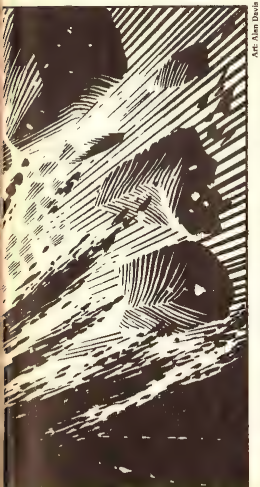
When Miracleman and V for Vendetta began their runs in the short-lived British comics magazine Warrior, Moore had no idea that he would have to see to their ends nearly seven years later. But while Eclipse Comics plans to continue Miracleman's adventures beyond the finale of book three in issue #16, Moore considers that final chapter "a fairly good parting shot" to the world of superheroes. For with the conclusion of V's third book at the end of that mini-series, the writer will be "saying goodbye to the superhero genre, the detective genre, to all genres basically" and viewing the future of comics from the vantage point of the most independent of independent publishing companies—his own.

Art: David Lloyd

"What V is doing in the course of the book is kicking away an awful lot of the crutches that Evey depends upon," Moore notes. "He wants her to take *complete* responsibility for what she does."

COMICS SCENE: Has it been easy to return to *V for Vendetta* after such a long time?

ALAN MOORE: No, it hasn't. One of the things which was a big problem with *V for Vendetta* was that in the intervening years, the political situation in this country [England] has slid an awful lot closer to the one that we depict in the series, and to some degree, when I came back to it, I found myself looking at the earlier work and thinking, "This is really naive. Reality has overtaken us." I was also looking at things like the fact that it would take something as melodramatic as a near-miss thermonuclear war to prod Britain towards fascism. Now, we actually do have a situation where there have been laws which threaten to close down the gay community. We're seeing government ministers speak quite openly about the way in which the laws have been designed to remove homosexual practices, homosexual relationships and to even remove homosexuality as a *concept*, which means tearing a page out of the dictionary. I mean, there have been conservative councilors over here quite openly advocating *gas chambers* for AIDS sufferers, all apparently with the Prime Minister's approval. In a situation like this, the scenario that we depicted in *V* suddenly becomes almost simplistic.


Art: Alan Davis

But I struggled with it for a couple of months, not really being able to make a great deal of headway, and suddenly—I don't know quite what happened—something turned around inside my brain. Instead of thinking how far short we had fallen of reality and letting that get in the way of properly engaging with *V* again, I tried to use some of my current bitterness concerning the British political situation as a fuel with which to get the story kick-started, and I found that that worked *wonderfully*. Once I found a way to articulate some of my anger, it suddenly seemed to make all the right connections and the story started flowing out again as if I had written the last episode the day before, rather than two or three years before. There were no major plot changes from the way I laid out the story when we were doing it for *Warrior*. The tone, I think, is subtly different as a result of being written during this time of troubles that we seem to be going through. So, in some ways, the thing that prevented me from really getting back into *V* as thoroughly as I had hoped to, was eventually the thing that gave me the impetus and the material to do just that.

***Miracleman* "had been a very radical superhero strip when I started it," Moore notes, but both his own work and that of others soon surpassed his original plans.**

CS: How did the project come together originally? Didn't you initially want to do a very 1930s pulp-style adventure?

MOORE: No, we were originally *asked* to do a very 1930s pulp-style adventure by Dez Skinn, who was the editor of *Warrior* and had previously been the editor of British Marvel's semi-original title, *Hulk Weekly*. Because Dez had had a '30s-pulp strip drawn by David Lloyd in *Hulk Weekly*, that being "Night-Raven," he decided that he also wanted one in *Warrior*. Now, David had said that he had been driven crazy by having to find reference on all these 1930s cars, and the last thing he wanted to do was another pulp adventure. So, I tried to work out what elements in a '30s pulp adventure you could use but leave out all the problems with the setting and time period that David had expressed. What I decided to do was approach the problem by going a little way into the future instead of a little way into the past.

Once I had that idea, it began to combine with a few others that have been drifting around my head for various lengths of time. There was an idea for a strip called "The Doll," which I'd had for some years, which involved a man in very theatrical makeup waging a lone war against a fascist government in the 1990s. David Lloyd had a sample strip that he had done a few pages of, which involved a woman guerrilla waging a war against a totalitarian state in the near future. I mean, there seemed to be a coincidence that was too good to pass up. So, various elements from both strips started to creep in to what eventually became *V*.

At first, I must say that we did it purely as an adventure strip with the proven for-

Art: David Lloyd

Since the artist didn't want to draw the '30s again, Moore tried to find those elements of pulp adventure that work with Lloyd's "marvelous atmospheric, shadowy artwork."

mula of one man against the state, the Robin Hood formula. But, as with *Watchmen*, as we actually started to work upon it, we found there were other elements creeping in, other meanings and significances that became apparent, and we found that we were getting more and more concerned with the story's dark, morally ambiguous areas than with the thrills and action content. From there, *V* evolved slowly into the strip that it is.

I actually imagine that it will be quite strange reading the series in the space of 10 months, given that when I wrote the very first episode, my daughter Amber was six months old and now she's seven-and-a-half. It's quite an amazing sweep of time, and there are stylistic differences. I remember being overjoyed with the first two books at the time, thinking that they were possibly the most advanced work I had ever done, but looking back, there are captions all over the place and other things which we later excised stylistically. In some ways, the early episodes do look a little crude. We decided to leave them how they were and show them warts and all because we thought that was more honest and faithful to the work.

CS: Speaking of the warts, now that 1997 is quite a bit closer to the present than when you started, were you thinking of nudging the date a little further ahead?

MOORE: No. *V for Vendetta* is not meant as a realistic prediction of the future. I mean, it was based on a Labour victory in the 1984 election, which never came about. The Third World War was supposed to start in 1988 and President Edward Kennedy would be supervising it from the American end. Obviously, all us Cassandras were quite a long way from the mark, but that doesn't really spoil what *V* is to me. It was never meant to be a serious, *literal* prediction. It was meant to be an atmospheric, emotional and political prediction of what our future might have for us. At the same time, it is an examination of the things that our society has in it today, but dressed up in more flamboyant and dramatic forms, so that the point could be made more accessible to the audience that *I* was dealing with. In those terms, I think it really doesn't matter.

CS: Considering its moral ambiguity, one could almost ask, is V *really* the hero of this? In the first book, you're rooting for him to go after everyone who had worked at that concentration camp, but in the second, when you see how his actions affect people like Inspector Finch and Rosemary Almond, you feel sorry for them.

MOORE: Yeah. If I had presented a story in which all the fascists were two-dimensional Nazis wearing monocles and chortling over human misery and then presenting V as the staunch anarchist fighting against them, that would have been a real betrayal of the truth. Even though I might find fascists morally and personally repugnant, I, at the same time, am certain that there probably are fascists who believe very deeply in what they're doing. I'm equally sure that there are also opportunists amongst them who are willing to espouse the cause for their own particular vile motives. But I wanted to try and portray it accurately, so that occasionally you may feel sympathy for the representatives of the state and particularly for people like Finch. At the same time, through the mouth of Evey, we express serious doubts about whether what V is doing is right. Now, these are probably more the main plot threads of *V for Vendetta* than all the excitement over who he really is and will his revolution succeed or not.

The main point of the series is this moral ambiguity. What we wanted to do is to actually make the reader think about this. We didn't want to force feed him or her a morality that we had predigested for them and which they could then happily and comfortably absorb. We wanted to give them many questions that were difficult to chew. *That* at least is the intention. The character who looks like the hero, well, is he *really* the hero? The characters who look like the villains, aren't there some sympathetic points about them?

I think my main point, probably in all of my work, is that I don't believe in heroes. I don't believe in them as separate beings to anybody else. The idea of a hero as a man in a white hat who has all the answers is a *dangerous* fallacy that leads directly to people like Oliver North. It's the idea that someone knows better than us what is right for us, somebody has decided to take into their hands things that will affect the lives and well-being of

ordinary people. That goes for most of the characters in *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta*. I don't want people to automatically assume that because the guy has a funny costume and is the title character that means he's right. It doesn't mean he's wrong, necessarily, but it doesn't mean he's right. The same goes for the villains. The fact that they are physically unprepossessing men with some hideous character flaws doesn't necessarily mean that they're wrong. I mean, Inspector Finch is no square-jawed hero, and we show that there are some elements in his personality where he has doubts and where he wonders, and these come out even more so in the third book.

We wanted to leave all the moral decisions up to the reader. We wanted to make this a work that the reader actually did have to think about on an emotional and moral level. What conclusions they come to are, of course, entirely up to the reader. If I can make them think for even the short space of time that they'll be involved reading *V for Vendetta*, then to me, that's worthwhile.

CS: What were the differences in picking up *V* and *Miracleman* years later?

MOORE: Basically, the differences stemmed from the natures of the strips. *V* presented problems for the reasons I outlined earlier. The problems with *Miracleman* were that it was a superhero strip and that when I started it, it had been a very radical strip. Since then, however, both my own work and the work of other people have gone a long way beyond the notions that I expressed in *Miracleman*. *Watchmen*, for example, went much further than I ever intended to go with *Miracleman*. So, returning to it, I found it almost a little flat and redundant. This presented problems because I already had the plotline laid down and established. I realized that I had to add some new elements to it if I was going to make the strip work both for myself and for its current readers. What I had to do with *Miracleman* was push it to a point of extremity even beyond that expressed in *Watchmen*. As far as I'm concerned, it's the ultimate conclusion: the basic idea of superheroes as god-figures.

CS: Why, at least for your own part, wrap up *Miracleman*? Certainly there are people who would love to keep reading your work on it.

MOORE: Sure, but unfortunately, there is a person who would not like to keep writing it. (*Laughs.*) Me. With every strip that I've done, there have been many people who would love to keep reading it, and I like D.R. & Quinch, I like Halo Jones, I like Swamp Thing. All the characters that I've written, I've had a great deal of affection for, and I like to think that that affection extends to knowing when to say good-bye. I could have carried on *Swamp Thing* for another, what, 10, 15, 20 issues? I wouldn't like to say what the standards of work would have been like. If I'm starting to lose interest in the strip, then that's going to show in the work, and I've never, ever done work that has not interested me. If it's no fun for me, it's no fun for the reader.

Art: Mick Anglo/Warrior Magazine; Copyright 1982, 1984 Quality Communications Ltd.

With *Miracleman*, I've reached a point where I am no longer interested in superheroes. It's as if, very much like the bottle of perfume that smashes in *Watchmen*, that old nostalgia that I was drawing upon has leaked out and evaporated. I mean, I shall always have a fondness for superheroes, but no greater than my fondness for the detective genre or the Western genre or whatever.

With me, what happened is that the real world has become far more fascinating than any imaginary landscape that I could create. The human beings that I see around me on the street seem much more rich and strange and fabulous than any ultra-powered being that I could invent for a comic strip. I've come to the same conclusion that science-fiction writer J.G. Ballard [*STARLOG* #126] came to a long time before me, that Earth is the last alien planet and that its populace are the last alien beings worthy of exploration. This is not to put down science fiction nor to put down fantasy. They've both served me very well in my time and I've had a lot of fun doing them. It's just that I've always used them to express concerns rooted in the real world. I've finally reached the point where I've thought, "Why not go directly to the source?" By that, I don't mean to say that I'm going into the same sort of autobiographical territory that people like Harvey Pekar handle so splendidly. I like to think of what I shall be doing as "documentary science

fiction." It will be the *real* world as if it was a science-fiction story.

CS: Do you think that there's a place in the current market for a comic like that?

MOORE: I don't *care*, to be perfectly honest. If there isn't, there should be. It has been very flattering, very pleasing

"Back when we did *V* [for *Warrior*]," Moore comments, "it was probably the most accurate portrayal of our future being done in British comics."

and of course very remunerative to find that people did enjoy the sorts of stories I like to write, but the stories that I like to write, *that* is the main prerequisite, not that people buy them.

Basically, with *Miracleman*, *V* and *Watchmen*, I have finished one phase of my career. All the work that I've ever done has been mainly concerned with moving into new areas. It's just that the last several new areas have all been comfortably contained within the overall boundaries of the superhero genre, and if I'm going to keep moving, I have to move outside it. But I don't want to just trade one genre for another. To me, genres are a fairly artificial phenomenon which seems to have been invented by a bored filing clerk in a bookshop some 40 years ago and which we've been stuck with ever since. I'm trying to come up with something which is more expressive of life as it is lived, and the world in reality is a sex-comedy-horror-science-fiction-murder mystery. It includes *all* genres. They *all* intermingle in the fabric of our lives. And if I'm going to show the world as I see it, I've got to try to interact a little more with the real stuff of the world that will always be beyond such classifications.

I've got no doubt that an awful lot of the Alan Moore fans out there will turn out to be Alan Moore superhero fans and will flock away in droves when they realize that there aren't any superheroes in the next type. I would like to think that was doing them an injustice. I have some very, very intelligent fans who certainly don't fall into the category of the myopic, narrow-minded superhero junkie. I've got a great deal of respect for the people who have managed to follow some of my near-incomprehensible ramblings in prose over the last seven years, and there'll probably be at least some of them who will find what I'm doing next hopefully very interesting.

CS: And what are you doing next?

MOORE: With Bill Sienkiewicz, I'm trying to come up with a kind of comic that they won't have seen before, that *I* won't have seen before. We're trying something that is very ambitious here. If it works, then it'll be great. If it doesn't work, too bad; I'll try something else. Admittedly, the stakes are higher in that this is my own publishing company, and I stand or fall by my own efforts. But although the stakes are higher, I have no intention of compromising the creative ideals that I have regarding this project, which is called *The Mandelbrot Set*. I'm trying to do better fiction than *Watchmen*, that expresses more and does it in a more entertaining and stylish way. I'm very, very excited about it. Bill is foaming at the mouth about it.

CS: What's *The Mandelbrot Set* about?

MOORE: It's about a number of things. What happens is that an American shopping mall of Californian scale, one of those monstrous, miniature cities you seem to have over there in LA, is erected in this small town in the middle of England. That's pretty much the whole plot. Since that has no doubt alienated readers immediately, I suppose I'll add to their alienation by saying that it's also about mathematics, skateboards, LSD, poetry, shoplifting, sex, practically all human life. I'm trying to do something which includes everything. I know that's a ridiculous proposition, but if any medium is capable of it, it's comics.

I can't really say an awful lot more about *The Mandelbrot Set*. I've already got a synopsis that runs to 51 pages without mentioning plot or characters, just talking about the work's conceptual basis. I can say it will hopefully be coming out towards the year's end. Don't hold me to that; it may be the year after. It will be a 12-issue series from my company, Mad Love Publishing. It will be in black and white, but we're hoping to do something quite unakin to what readers might have as their general idea of black and white work. Bill and I are approaching the idea of black and white as

Moore and Lloyd found the "perfect visual for V" in an ever-smiling mask fashioned after Guy Fawkes, remembered in England for his attempt to blow up Parliament.

Art: David Lloyd

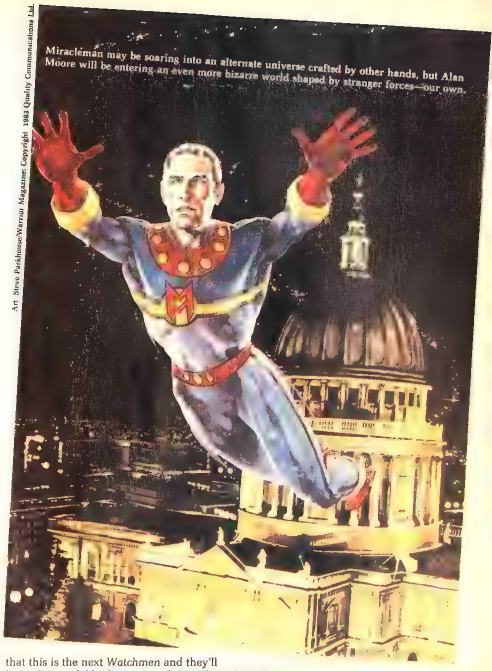
if it were some new technological capability that we had only just discovered, as if printers had been laboring for years to come up with a way to produce images in black and white rather than boring old color. That's about as much as I can say about it.

CS: Are you doing all the projects from your own company?

MOORE: Yeah. The first book that will be coming out from Mad Love Publishing, a benefit book called *A.A.R.G.H.* It stands for Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia, and it's a book we've put together to fight against some of the wave of oppression being directed at the homosexual community in Britain. This has happened very suddenly over the last couple of months. This law has been introduced, and now the gay bars can be closed, the gay switchboards can be closed, the gay community can more or less cease to exist. So, what we've done is put together a book which has contributions from almost anybody who's anybody in the comics industry. There are contributions from Frank Miller, Dave Sim, the Brothers Hernandez, Art Spiegelman, Robert Crumb, Howard Cruse, Jaimie Delano, and dozens of others who are too numerous to mention. The *Swamp Thing* team of Steve Bissette, John Totleben and Rick Veitch, along with me, will be doing an eight-page strip on the history of the subculture. It has a cover by David McKean, who is becoming quite popular because of his *Hellblazer* covers. This will be coming out hopefully in late August. All the money for the magazine will be going to O.L.G.A., the Organization of Lesbian and Gay Action.

It's a sort of unusual and atypical way to start a publishing company. We [Moore, Phyllis Moore and Deborah Delano] had been thinking of starting one for some time, but we would probably have carried on thinking about it and never got around to actually doing it if this rather pernicious law hadn't suddenly materialized and given us a much-needed kick. After *A.A.R.G.H.*, we'll be producing more conventional work. *The Mandelbrot Set* will be the first new fiction from Mad Love.

Also, although I have finished *V for Vendetta* and *Miracleman* since concluding *Watchmen*, I don't really consider them to be post-*Watchmen* work. They are old works which I have finished to the best of my ability. *The Killing Joke* is another thing that I'm rather *embarrassed* by. I mean, it's a wonderful piece of work by Brian Bolland, but for my part, I don't think the story's anything spectacular. It's a long Batman story that you might feel quite pleased with if you came across it in an annual, but it has been awaited for so long and there has been probably more advertising for it than for *Dark Knight, Batman: Year One* and *Watchmen* put together. So, I think people have almost got themselves hyped up into believing that this is the next *Watchmen* and they'll be understandably disappointed. So, *The Killing Joke*, *Miracleman* and *V* are loose ends tied up from pre-*Watchmen* days. *The Mandelbrot Set* is the first major work that I'll have attempted since completing *Watchmen*, and it's something that I'm very much looking forward to getting my teeth into after a long and soothing layoff. ■


Miracleman may be soaring into an alternate universe crafted by other hands, but Alan Moore will be entering an even more bizarre world shaped by stranger forces—our own.
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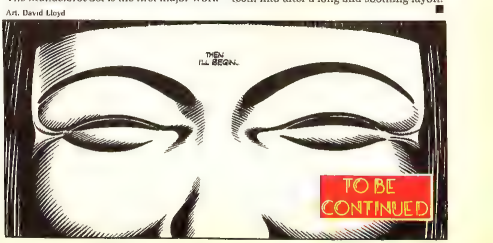

Always Faithful—in Comic Book Fashion

An ex-Marine and a pair of veteran comic artists enlist to tell the Leathernecks' story throughout history in "Semper Fi'."

Semper Fi' is one of those terms that can be used in many ways. It's a shortened form of *Semper Fidelis*, the Marine motto. It can be derogatory: 'What do you think of that?' 'Well, Semper Fi', Mac!' But, it can just be a greeting to all ex-Marines." That's how Michael Palladino, former Marine and new comic-book writer, explains the title of his first series, due out in August from Marvel Comics.

Following on the heels of *The 'Nam*, Marvel's other reality-based military series, *Semper Fi*' is the story of a pair of families of professional Marines, the Whittiers and the Gimbels. "Through these men and women, we'll trace the history of the Marine Corps, from its birth in 1775 to the present," Palladino says. "The Marines have always been America's force in readiness, the first to fight. This series will show what kind of people have been attracted to the Corps during its history."

Among those sorts of people is Palladino himself. Currently a freelance writer, Palladino served a three-and-a-half year stint with the Marines, including a tour of duty in Vietnam.

"I was in the Corps from '65 to '69. I enlisted," Palladino reveals. "I was 16 when I graduated high school. I didn't want to go to college, and Vietnam was just a coincidence. I went to Vietnam in '67, got shot up, went back into combat, and left in '68. Then, I still had a year-and-a-half in the Corps. I went to college when I got out, and then my freelance writing career began in earnest."

His interest in comics dates from his pre-teen years, an interest reborn during his service with the Corps. "I was an old Superman fan, as well as of Green Lantern and the Flash," the writer recalls. "Those were the only comics I knew about, DC's. After my mother had her fit and ripped up all my comics, I didn't really go back to them until I joined the Marines. Many guys in the Marines read comics, *most* military people do. So, I came in contact with the Marvel series like *Nick Fury*, *Spider-Man* and *Captain America*. I looked at them, but I wanted to write novels and short stories.

"Then, a short time ago, I heard Marvel had this comic called *The 'Nam*. The idea sounded great, and I tried to get involved in the project. I wrote a letter to the then-editor, Larry Hama, and sent him a short story I'd had published about Vietnam. Larry referred my letter to [*'Nam* writer] Doug Murray, but he took me to lunch, and told me he wanted to do a book about the Corps. *Semper Fi*' was born."

Art: John Severin

"*Semper Fi*' won't be a traditional war book like *Sgt. Fury* or *Sgt. Rock*," Palladino says.

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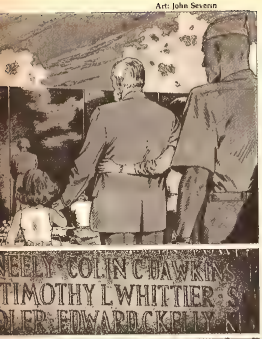
Art: Sam Glanzman

"Sam Glanzman, who is an ex-Navy man, did some of the Continental Marine stories," Palladino notes. "He would be more comfortable handling ships."

Art: John Severin

Art: John Severin



"War is not a pleasant thing," Palladino says, "and you have to show people what war really is," even its aftermath.

The series, while historical, will jump around in time, covering specific periods when ideas for stories arise. "I have continuing characters who show up at various periods," Palladino notes. "You'll see a character as a very young man in one period, and in a story set a little later, he'll show up as an older man. I started setting up a family timeline, and I realized that I was going to run out of people around issue #8, before I ran out of stories. So, I decided to branch off the story—one of the Whittier sisters marries a man named Gimbel—and through the Whittiers and the Gimbels, you'll see *every* aspect of the Marine Corps. I may even come up with a cousin from another branch of the family if I can't cover a story otherwise."

While the specific incidents of each adventure will be fictional, the circumstances surrounding them will be based in fact, Palladino says. "The characters will be involved in *real* places and events. I've done stories set in the Boxer Rebellion, Nicaragua in the 1930s, and a story about a mail heist, set in the period when the Marines were guarding mail trains in the 1920s. That one involved a character I had used earlier in a World War I story.

"I've done a few stories on Vietnam, a few on World War II, Korea. Each time I begin a storyline, I'll just follow it out."

Any historical series relies on research, and *Semper Fi'* is no exception. Palladino has found several sources of information.

John Severin: Always in Combat

Military history is a special interest of mine," says John Severin, the veteran war, Western and humor artist who is the principal illustrator of *Semper Fi'*, Marvel Comics' new series featuring the history of the Marine Corps.

"I think it must be in the genes," Severin admits, chuckling. "My uncle was with the Fighting 69th [a much-decorated battalion] and he would tell me stories about the First World War. I even remember sitting at the knee of the celebrated Father Duffy, their chaplain.

"From there, the interest just grew. History was always my best subject in school."

Naturally, that interest has served Severin well in his comics illustrating career. Among some of his best-known work are the war stories he drew for writer/editor Harvey Kurtzman during the 1950s for EC Comics. How do *Semper Fi'* writer Michael Palladino's scripts compare to Kurtzman's legendary work? "It's like comparing apples to oranges," Severin says.

"It would take someone with a better literary bent than mine to do the comparison justice. It's like comparing Rudyard Kipling and Ernest Hemingway—both do what they do well, but they do it completely differently. The differences between Palladino's and Kurtzman's scripts are clear in my mind," Severin admits, "but I haven't got the words to describe them."

Severin does know that Palladino's scripts are very complete—just the way he likes it. "If I get a full script, I want it to be detailed and explicit.

"I have worked from plot outlines," he recalls, "but that takes more time. I then have to do part of the writer's job, and I'm not being paid for it."

As might be expected in a man with an acknowledged interest in military history (and a job that lets him make use of it), Severin has acquired an extensive library of references on military costuming and hardware over the years. Surprisingly, however, he says it's not in particularly good order.

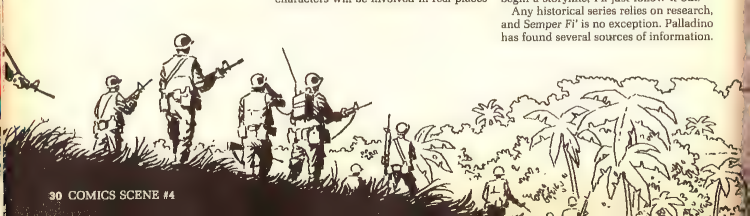
"The library is *not* referenced or indexed. I just know roughly what pile things are in," he laughs. "It was taking too much time to file things that carefully. Now, it's just that all the airplanes are in one pile; all the rifles are in another . . ."

But even Severin's library can't be complete, he notes. "What I can't find among my own materials I hunt down in the public library. I also belong to a military history organization and, if I need something specific, I can usually write to an expert in that period, who can supply it within a few days' time."

Severin says the glory days at EC, while important, are something of a blur to him now. "I was breaking into the business about 1952 or '53, I guess. It's hard to remember. Remembering yesterday is like recalling 10 years ago sometimes.

"But I know I was lucky to get a break then. I couldn't ink with a brush, which was the accepted style, just with a pen. The folks at EC were still willing to give me a chance. I still use a pen *exclusively*."

Today, most fans know Severin from his contributions to *Cracked* and his years of work in the mid-1960s as an inker for Marvel Comics, notably adding his detailed touch to Dick Ayers' pencils on Sgt. *Fury and His Howling Commandos* and to Herb Trimpe's pencils on *The Incredible Hulk*.



"The trick to inking a good penciller like Ayers or Trimpe—and a good penciller is one who puts down a clean, finished image—is *not* to overpower him," Severin explains.

"I wanted it to still be the *penciller's* work. The pencils had been approved by the editor; that's what was wanted. That's not to say I would not correct an obvious error.

"But a penciller who leaves me very sketchy stuff is really asking me to do part of his job, and I'm not being paid for that, either."

Severin got a chance to break out of the war/Western/superhero mold when he took on the task of inking his sister Marie's pencils on Marvel's first *Kull the Conqueror* series, starring Robert E. Howard's lesser-known barbarian hero.

"Working with anyone you know well—like Marie—is much easier," Severin says. "You know where they're coming from. You don't have as much trouble putting yourself inside their heads."

But is a fantasy like *Kull*, or even his own recently completed *Conan* graphic novel, difficult for a realist like John Severin? Not in the least, he replies.

"On a fantasy like *Kull* or *Conan*, the art *has* to be realistic. I approach it *exactly* the same way as an historical story. I try to find reference for the clothes and the buildings. The figures must be realistic.

"Even if there are wizards and monsters and skeletons that walk," he continues, "those skeletons *must* be anatomically correct. When Kull breaks them apart with his sword, they have to break the way a real skeleton would, or the illusion is lost."

One thing is certain—whether Marine combat, Western adventure, or sword-and-sorcery conflict—the art of John Severin will never lose the illusion.

—Patrick Daniel O'Neill

Fascinated by his uncle's World War I adventures, John Severin was eager to tackle historical tales.

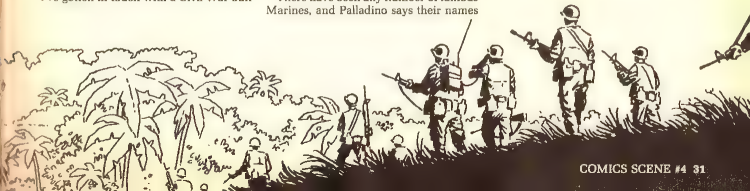
Art: John Severin

"I have to do some research to set people in a particular era," he admits. "For instance, I did a story on the Continental Marine Corps. In the earliest days, many of them didn't even have uniforms. That kind of story requires the most research in order to give the artist accurate information. I responded to a letter written to *Leatherneck* [a Marine magazine], and that has gotten me some good sources. I'll be doing a story about the Civil War, and I've gotten in touch with a Civil War buff who was an ex-Marine, who will be giving me the specs for both the Union and Confederate Marines."

Another problem, Palladino notes, is the Marines' reputation as a pretty salty bunch. "Language can be a problem—Marines in combat can be pretty vulgar. So you have to sacrifice the 'damns' and 'hells' and whatnots for 'gosh' and 'heck.' You can focus on the action instead of the dialogue."

There have been any number of famous Marines, and Palladino says their names will come up in *Semper Fi'*, but rarely as on-stage characters. "Any historically significant Marines they meet will be in passing, or as background. There are a great many famous and colorful Marines: Dan Dailey, who was the only man to ever win two Medals of Honor; there's a Marine general named Smedley Butler; Chesty Puller, who won five Navy

(continued on page 67)



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Part One

By ADAM PIRANI

The prime suspect in Roger Rabbit's interactive mystery may very well be Richard Williams, the man who brought him to life.

Who *Framed Roger Rabbit?* Richard Williams, that's who. As director of animation on the Disney/Amblin production, Williams was responsible for putting Roger into every frame of film in which the rabbit appears. He designed the movie's new Toon characters for director Robert Zemeckis (STARLOG #134) and executive producer Steven Spielberg, and, at Roger's animation studio in London, England, Williams supervised the 200-plus person-years' work that was required to hand-draw 60 minutes (86,400 frames) of Toons.

Born in 1933 in Toronto, Canada, Williams went to London in the late 1950s and has been based there ever since. His first animated short film, *The Little Island*, made in 1958, won a British Academy Award and was nominated for an Oscar. In the following years, Williams' work was lauded at film festivals all over the world. He created animated title sequences for the *Pink Panther* movies, *Casino Royale*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *What's New, Pussycat?* and many others. In 1971, he won an Oscar for his adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Meanwhile, he worked on more than 2,500 animated commercials made at his London studio.

Jessica Rabbit entertains! "I'm not bad," she confesses, "I'm just drawn that way."

But Williams' most ambitious animated work has yet to be finished. A full-length feature conceived in the mid-60s and now titled *The Thief and the Cobbler*, the project has proceeded part-time on the investment of money and spare time that Williams and his studio have earned from commercial work. Employing the skills of veteran animators from the 1940s, and using no short cuts, Williams' *Thief*—according to those who have seen the uncompleted footage—is astonishing.

Not surprisingly, this played a significant part in how Williams became involved with *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*? "It's a long series of coincidences," he says, sitting in his office, drawing board beside him, at the three-story *Roger Rabbit* animation studio in London. "Milt Kahl, who is the greatest animator, quit Disney, retired from animation, and he recently died. But two years ago, I rang him up—because I hadn't phoned in years, and I found out he had some sort of heart trouble—so I said, 'Cripes, I had better come and see you fast.' We've been making this feature for 23 years now, and he had seen some of the early stuff, and I said, 'I better come and show it to you.'

"I went to see him, and I brought the film to him in San Francisco. Now, because the picture's in Panavision, double-head, the only place where they could run it was ILM, George Lucas' place, and I did that through an art director named Tony Walton—he's a friend of mine, and he knew Lucas personally. I got Lucas' secretary, Jane Bay, and I said, 'Can I rent your theater for tonight?'

"So, [there was] this great big empty theater, and I took Milt and his wife to look at my 15 minutes of completed stuff on *The Thief* At the screening's end, the projectionist came running out with the sound mixer of *Ewoks* or something and they said, 'This is the greatest animation I've ever seen! When's the movie coming out?' And I told them, 'Well first, *this* is the greatest animator. This is Milt Kahl, *he's* the greatest animator. We don't have the money for the movie, and nobody knows when it's coming out, we're just making it.' Then, the secretary came out, and she said, 'Oh, you're a friend of George Lucas,' and I said, 'No, no, I don't know him, I have a friend who knows George Lucas, that's why . . .' 'Oh, well, is George going to back this movie?' and I said, 'No, no, no, this is just to show this great animator *my* stuff, I'm kind of his student . . .'

"Anyway, the next thing I knew," remembers Williams, "Robert Watts, who is *Roger Rabbit*'s producer, rang me in London and said, 'I understand you want to see George Lucas.' I told him, 'Well, no. I mean, yes or no . . .' And he said, 'Well,

"I animated an awful lot of the front bit of the picture," explains Williams.

All Roger Rabbit Photos & Art Copyright 1988 The Walt Disney Company

what is it with this film?' It must have spread through the troops, you see, everybody was screaming and yelling. Robert came over and saw the picture, and he knew my work from years [before], but he said, 'This is an amazing project; let me show this to Lucas and Spielberg.'

"So, he took it away and showed it to Lucas, who wasn't interested in financing other people's work at that time. Robert said, 'I think Spielberg would be much more interested.' He went to Spielberg, and as he was coming into the room, they were all tearing their hair out because they couldn't find anybody who they thought could do this rabbit. Zemeckis was working with Amblin developing the project, and they were frantic about it, and Robert Watts walks in with *The Thief*. They ran that, and said, '*Get* that guy!' and Zemeckis came over. At the same time—the week after I met Zemeckis—Chuck Jones [STARLOG #108, CSQ #2], whom they had in as an advisor for the picture, suddenly said, 'Oh hell, get Dick, that's the guy you want to do your rabbit.' "

Williams' initial meeting with Zemeckis was a significant day in the cinematic life of Roger Rabbit. "We hit it off instantly," Williams recalls. "Within an hour-and-a-half, we virtually solved the whole technical problem of how to do this picture.

"Our studio had just done some worldwide commercials with Disney characters for Fanta, and they were mixed with live action: We did a football game and an outer space thing. We had very good live action, a very good cameraman, and I started to violate most of the rules about mixing animation with live because I *hate* them. I started trying to get more interaction, and we were having hand-held cameras, and with Donald Duck and hard-edged cartoons running between people's legs, which are soft edges. There were a number of little things—and it *worked*.

"I told Zemeckis that I [had] started violating these rules that were created by the lazy or lazy/stupid animators, either one or the other—you know, since the '40s, everybody's brain went to sleep. And I said, 'I don't think any of these rules apply at all,' like *You must have a flat plate*, and *You must light the characters all flat to fit the flatness of the animation*—so everything was flat, the characters are pasted in, and it's very unpleasant.

"Bob, of course, agreed instantly, and I said, 'I think the key is interaction,' and he said, 'Absolutely, these things affect each other.'

"It started getting really interesting, and I said, 'The more the things can interact [the better], and he [Zemeckis] said, 'But don't you have to shoot this flat?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Yeah, but you can't shoot a thing where it's all turning [i.e. the camera moving] like a modern movie.' and I said, 'Yes, you can. You just leave us a hole, we'll draw the character.' He said, 'Yes, but how are you going to keep the feet firm, they'll slide.' I said, 'Our *job* is to turn things, so why can't we turn things? Why can't we have a rabbit with big flat feet, and you zip around him? We just draw the feet, we find a mark on the floor, we write [on the] hardwood, you put your rabbit's toes there, you've got a mark to keep on, and we just turn it.' He said, '*Really*, you can do that? I thought you couldn't do that.' I said, 'Well that's just these stupid animators,' and he said, 'You're right, I've met a few of them.' "

Comments Williams, "I think that's when Bob got me, because he must have thought, 'This guy isn't like those other animators, he's brave,' or, 'Let's see if he can deliver. . . .'

"So, Bob said, 'Let's try it, godammit. We'll do a test, and we'll see if we can do it.' Certainly the puppetry is so *advanced* nowadays—all these tremendous techniques that the Muppets people started—that we could get a great deal of interaction. We have all that going for us,

"The more things interact," Williams notes, the better. Here, Bob Hoskins and Roger Rabbit share a quiet moment on location with a sort of Toonerville Trolley.

Williams' 23-year work-in-progress, *The Thief and the Cobbler*, got hung up a bit longer when he devoted himself to the exploits of Jessica & Roger Rabbit.

and the guys at ILM, like Ken Ralston [visual effects supervisor], they're *wonderful* at printing the stuff in so that they don't look pasted on like a piece of glass with this flat character.

"Chris Knott worked out how to make the character round. It's like little black mattes, which they throw out of focus at ILM on the optical printer, and rimlighting. Put a rim light around anything, and you get this illusion of depth.

"Then, the split. The technology was there and Zemeckis had this very brilliant idea. It's a motion control thing," Williams explains, "where they can mask off a piece of the screen, so you can have a live action woman's hands, affecting Bob Hoskins' hair for example, and then they obliterate the woman's body, and you see the background. It's just like she has been removed from the screen. That means we could draw in an *impossibly* shaped woman, with a waist the size of a fingernail or something, so it could never have been rotoscoped, except for the hands, which is the part that's affecting the live characters.

"This all happened, as I recall, in an hour-and-a-half. I said, 'Well, go shoot a modern movie. Don't pay *any* attention to the animator. Just leave a hole, and get as much interaction as you can,' and then they knew ILM could bring up the rear with all their exposures.

"So, very quickly, we did a test at ILM and Bob really shot an obstacle course, to see if I could perform, and to see if all their systems would work."

That "impossibly shaped woman" Jessica Rabbit serenades Eddie Valiant (Bob Hoskins) and Marvin Acme (Stubby Kaye, foreground).

Every supposed rule of combined animation with live action was broken in this test. "When we finally saw the finished thing—I mean, it was insane, because I thought, 'How come in 60 or more years of film no one ever thought of this? That the key is interaction—to affect each other?' And then of course you've got eye-lines, to get those characters so that they don't look like they're in *Mary Poppins* with those vacant looks.

"I remember when the first test came in, Bob rang me up and he was screaming down the phone, 'I was *born* to make this picture! You haven't seen this; Spielberg's jumping up and down!' Spielberg said, apparently, he has only seen this in his life *twice*, the first time was when Lucas showed him the tests on the spaceships for *Star Wars*, and he said, 'This is the second. These animated characters, they're *in* the movie, they're *in* there.'

"The result of this married test piece meant that Disney and Spielberg got together on the project, because Disney had the rights, and the creative team was put in by Spielberg and Zemeckis, and they wanted me and my studio.

"At that point, we were doing quite a bit of work on our movie, *The Thief*, and I really *didn't* want to stop, because I was finally getting somewhere. But then I thought, 'Gee, this is going to be two years of rabbits, but by the end maybe I'll be covered with [*The Thief*].' Robert Watts kept saying, 'Are you crazy? You've got to do this. This'll get you the fairy dust which will attract the finance for the picture, and we'll all help you.' Frank Marshall [of Amblin, *Roger Rabbit* producer] said he would help me and he has, so I said, 'OK, if it's two years of rabbits . . .' "

"At the same time as doing the test, we were trying to design the rabbit," Williams says. "That was the fun part. I would fly out to LA and be spoiled and sit in a room and do drawings. Bob would come running in and out and say, 'That's funny, that's not funny,' and then I would keep doing drawings of the rabbit, and we got him, finally.

"I remember being very jet-lagged and stupid and drawing Baby Herman in a corner, totally jet-lagged, and *those* were the designs. I thought they were terrible at the time, [but] Spielberg said, 'Well, that's wrapped. You got it in one shot.'

"Jessica took an awfully long time," Williams explains. "At the beginning, she was far too realistic—it was like moving illustration. The writers and Bob felt very strongly that she should be more cartoony, and we started making her more that way. Russell Hall, who animated her, took over on her and pushed her. He did a very, very good job."

The look of the film's animation was

The weasels were a problem. "People are so used to drawing smiling little bears, that when they have to draw a really *nasty* weasel, they keep sliding back into little bears," Williams says.

carefully planned. "Zemeckis said, 'It should be Disney articulation, Warners characters, and Tex Avery humor, but a little less brutal, just a little.' " Consequently, researching and preparing reference on these techniques and on the troop of characters from different companies who had never before shared the screen were added to Williams' other preproduction tasks. "I got all the reference material together, thousands of videotapes, and ripped old cartoon books apart and started pasting up things so that we could do everything in a style. It was fun, that first year."

Principal photography of the live actors took place before any animation began, and initially, it was planned that Williams would be on set to advise and consult with director Zemeckis. "Ken Ralston would be one papoose, strapped to Bob's back, there to check the live action, the lighting, for ILM, and I would be the other one, the one with a pencil.

"What happened was that after a little bit, I didn't *have* to be at the live action, because it was very clear that Ken knew what animation needs. He was a friend of Tex Avery, and Ken got into special effects through wanting to do cartoons.

"We were setting up here, and the pressure really went on," he notes. "We had to get at least 20 animators who didn't exist, and then they all had to have assistants who didn't exist." Twenty-five crew members accompanied him to the production from his company Richard Williams Animation, eventually becoming "the spine of the studio," according to Williams.

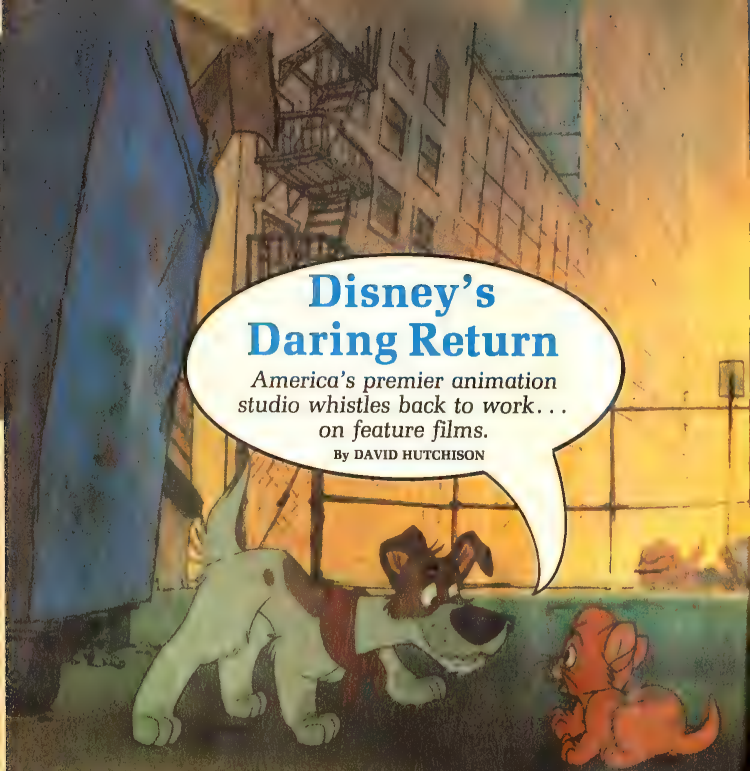
"Then, Disney sent in two of their best men, Andreas Deja and Phil Nibbelink, and then Russell Hall and Simon Wells were my two best animators, and they were the four supervising animators. We got another 20 animators, one right out of art school; guys came from Australia, a Frenchman, Germans, and some Americans popped in. We ended up with 26 animators and had 220 people in this building."

The title, animator, is not used to describe all members of an animation crew. "The animator is the guy who gives the performance," Williams explains, "and that means he does the main drawings, maybe half the drawings for the scene." The "in-between" drawings are done by assistants (24 drawings are required for each second of film). Other artists complete the process by drawing in ink, painting in color and detailing the pictures. "The animator is like the actor, but with a pencil," Williams says, "and all I was, was in charge of the actors—the animators."

Richard Williams (foreground) says director Robert Zemeckis (rear) "liked nearly everything we did. He said, 'Phone me at home.' So, pretty soon, the animators caught on that they *could* disturb him at home, and he'd like it because he never stopped working."

His first six weeks' work was for the entirely animated sequence at the movie's beginning. Then, with the live action film having been shot and edited, the animators began to work on the interactive scenes. "We would see the rushes, and Don Hahn would get the photos [black-and-white prints of individual live action frames] printed up, big or small, whatever size we needed. Then, we would call in the animators

(continued on page 60)



Disney's Daring Return

America's premier animation studio whistles back to work... on feature films.

By DAVID HUTCHISON

Executives of the Walt Disney Studios are underscoring their commitment to the production of quality animated films in America. Citing their recent successes in live action production, especially those titles released as Touchstone films (*Ruthless People, Stakeout, Three Men and a Baby, Good Morning Vietnam*, etc.), Jeffrey Katzenberg (Chairman of The Walt Disney Studios) expresses the hope that their aggressive activity in live action won't overshadow "our equally ambitious plans and productivity in animation. For the first time since *Bambi* in 1942, stresses Katzenberg, "we will begin releasing a new animated feature every year, beginning this November with *Oliver and Company*."

While the average live-action Touchstone feature takes 12 months to produce, Katzenberg emphasizes, animated features still require four to five years from initial story development to answer print. Therefore, in order to meet an annual release schedule, many projects must be in production at the same time, on staggered schedules, operating simultaneously within the various departments of the animation studio. *Oliver and Company* is now out of the animators' hands, and in the final stages of cel painting and camera.

"There are five totally animated features that we are currently working on," Katzenberg announces. "Beyond Oliver, our production schedule includes the following projects:

"The *Little Mermaid*, based on the famous Hans Christian Andersen story, is the first classic fairy tale produced by the studio in 30 years (*Sleeping Beauty* being the last). Now being animated, it is scheduled for November 1989 release.

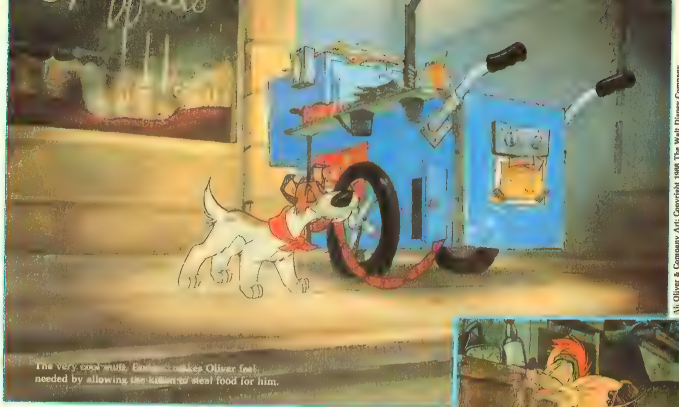
"A sequel to our popular 1976 feature, *The Rescuers*, has an approved script which is now being storyboarded. This adventure, which takes place in Australia, is *The Rescuers Down Under*.

"We are also in the process of adapting more fairy tales. *Beauty and the Beast*, under consideration at the studio for almost 45 years, is being scripted.

"And lastly, Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, who created songs and music for *The Little Mermaid* (as well as *the Little Shop of Horrors* musical), have again collaborated on some great new songs for a music-filled fantasy adventure based on The Arabian Nights, for which Howard has written the story."

The director of *Oliver and Company* is George Scribner, whose previous experience includes working as an animator on *The Black Cauldron* and a stint at Hanna-Barbera's feature unit. He supervises a team of directing animators headed by Glen Keane, who have been working with three or four writers to develop the story of *Oliver and Company*, which is very loosely based on Charles Dickens' novel, *Oliver Twist*.

"This story takes place in New York City," explains Keane, who begins to sketch the action rapidly on a large pad. "It starts on the streets, on the sidewalk, in a small box. The sign on the box says 'Free Kittens.' Well, one little kitten is left. He needs a home. This is Oliver."



The very cool mutt [illegible] makes Oliver feel needed by allowing the kitten to steal food for him.

\Ni Oliver & Company. Art: Copyright 1988 The Walt Disney Company

Among the many celebrities lending their vocal talents to the project, Cheech Marin bow wows as the irrepressible Tito.

Photo: Copyright 1988 The Walt Disney Company

Bambi Art: Copyright 1942 The Walt Disney Company

Disney hopes to recapture the magic of classics like *Bambi* (now in re-release) in the studio's new ventures.

Veteran animator Mike Cedeno directs the studio's first computer-animated short, *Oilspot & Lipstick*. Set in a junkyard, the 3½-minute film spotlights a dog and his girl friend, who just happen to be made out of scrap parts.

A small pair of kitten eyes and ears peer over the edge of the box at the big world outside in Keane's drawing, as the artist continues to sketch rapidly. "I wish we could animate this fast," he jokes as he tears off sheet after sheet of simple story scenes.

"Oliver is an innocent, who needs to find a place to belong. As he begins to explore the city streets, he meets this cool dog, a mutt, really, whose name is Dodger. Dodger is the leader of a gang of dogs that work for Fagin, a human. Dodger gets Oliver to help him steal a whole string of sausages from a pushcart peddler. Oliver thinks this is great because somebody needs him. He follows Dodger along and joins this gang of dogs. He thinks this is home, but this isn't the home this little guy needs. He doesn't know that yet, though. During one of the gang's heists, when they stop a chauffeur, a little girl in the car takes Oliver back to her rich place in a nice section of town. The gang thinks it's horrible that this poor little cat has been taken, so they decide to rescue him. They succeed in getting Oliver away from Jenny, the little girl, but Oliver confesses to his old pals that he was happy there with her.

"Suddenly, the story takes a horrible turn when Sykes, the villain to whom Fagin owes money, sees Jenny as the potential for much bigger bucks and *kid-nops* her."

"Integrated into this story are five contemporary songs," says Peter Schneider (vice president, feature animation, Walt Disney Pictures). "The title theme song, which is performed by Huey Lewis, is 'Once Upon a Time in New York City,' written by Barry Manilow and Howard Ashman. Bette Midler, who voices the character of Georgette, a pampered Park Avenue poodle, sings 'Perfect Isn't Easy' by Barry Manilow. Billy Joel, the voice of Dodger, struts to 'Why Should I Worry?'

which was written by Howard Midnight and Dan Hartman. Ruth Pointer sings 'Streets of Gold,' which is a bonding song for the entire gang. The last tune is sung by Jenny, voiced by Natalie Gregory and was written by animator Rob Minkoff and our production coordinator Ron Rocha. The background score is by J.A.C. [*St. Elsewhere*] Redford.

"Oliver is played by Joey Lawrence and Fagin by Dom DeLuise. The various gang members include: Richard Mulligan as Einstein, a mindless mutt with a dumbbell look; Roscoe Lee Browne, as Francis, a Shakespearean bulldog; and Cheech Marin as Tito, an incredible chihuahua with a Latin temper. Robert Loggia is the voice of the mysterious Sykes, of whom little is seen."

One of the hallmarks of the Disney Studio, historically, has been not only Walt Disney's ability to take advantage of the latest technical advances but to make them serve his will, which in the case of his animated films was to tell a story in the most visually compelling manner possible. Working with his longtime associate Ub Iwerks, the studio developed the use of sound, color, the multi-plane camera, animation effects, and widescreen techniques. Recently, the studio has been experimenting with computer animation, the first brief use of which was for a few shots in *The Black Cauldron* and more recently in *The Great Mouse Detective* for a chase sequence through the five-ton mechanism of London's famous Clock Tower.

"The use of computer animation will be taking a *huge* leap with *Oliver and Company*," affirms Keane, who has been helping the studio develop techniques for integrating character animation with computer-generated backgrounds for several years (STARLOG #77).

"We are integrating computer animation throughout the *entire* picture, though the average audience member probably won't be aware of it as computer animation; subliminally, they'll be aware of a greater sense of realism. What is so exciting about this new technology is that it takes a three-dimensional environment and lets you move through it."

A moving camera is taken for granted in a live-action film, but traditionally, backgrounds in an animated film are just flat paintings. Walt Disney's earliest attempts to solve this problem led to the development of the multi-plane camera. Computer-animated backgrounds are the next big step.

"I want to emphasize," interrupts Schneider, "that the computer is *not* replacing the animator. It is animating backgrounds. The computer has enabled us to do very complicated camera moves; it has made it possible for us to have a realistic modern-day New York City with traffic-filled streets."

The layouts for a given sequence are digitized, along with trucks, buses and cars. The background animation with moving street camera and moving camera is printed out by the computer one frame at a time on standard animation paper. These sheets are interleaved with the animator's character drawings. By flipping through the pages, the animator can move his character through a complicated scene. "We couldn't have done this picture without the computer," notes Keane.

Just as *Oliver and Company* is based on Dickens' *Oliver Twist*," begins co-producer and lyricist Howard Ashman, "*The Little Mermaid* is also based on a well-known story: the Hans Christian Andersen story of the mermaid who falls in love with the prince.

"In our version, not only do we have the mermaid and the little prince, but there is a great witch, Ursala—half-octopus and half-human—and there is a Rastafarian crab named Sebastian, who exists for the purpose of allowing us to introduce some contemporary musical ideas into a more classic format. Also, there are an evil pair of moray eels named Flotsam and Jetsam, who work with Ursala; a dithering seagull named Scuttle; and a sadistic chef, who likes to prepare fish dishes.

"This is the first time in a long time that Disney has attempted a classic fairy tale. It is a tremendous burden and the dream of a lifetime to try to create something that might sit on the shelf next to *Sleeping Beauty* and *Peter Pan*."

Directing the film are John Musker and Ron Clements, who worked so successfully together on Disney's last animated feature, *The Great Mouse Detective* [STARLOG #108]. "*The Little Mermaid* is next in line behind *Oliver*," explains Clements. "At this point, with *Oliver* just finishing in animation, we're waiting to get all these animators, so we can get *Little Mermaid* going.

"We already have thousands of story and character sketches. Of course, all these films begin with a script, which John [Musker] and I wrote and to which Howard [Ashman] and Alan [Menken] wrote their songs. But, the biggest part of production is drawing, lots and lots of drawings. Animation is a visual medium, and most of the inspiration for the film's action comes from the artist."

Photo Copyright 1988 The Walt Disney Company

With Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Mermaid* (seen here as the statue in Copenhagen Harbor), Disney returns to its fairy tale roots.

Photo Copyright 1988 The Walt Disney Company

Behind Vice President of feature animation Peter Schneider (left) and Roy E. Disney are the storyboards to *Oliver and Company*. Ahead lie four other fully-animated works, now in progress.

Howard Ashman tells *Mermaid*'s story using some rough sketches, which have been created to stimulate the animators. "Our mermaid is Ariel, a princess, daughter of the king, Trident," begins Ashman. "Ariel is fascinated by humans and is just crazy about everything having to do with the world above that she has just barely glimpsed.

"Her hobby and passion is to collect human artifacts from wrecked ships, a secret collection of human treasures. When she sings 'I Want,' she is sitting in her secret grotto which is just teeming with things like hair brushes, hat pins, trunks, books, shoes, forks, knives, etc., and all of these things are inestimably magical to her. Ariel is voiced by Jodi Lawrence, who sings this song to her little friend, because her father, who doesn't want her to have anything to do with humans, has just yelled at her.

"So, as the story goes," Clements continues, "she first meets the Prince in a shipwreck; he is drowning and she saves him. She drags him to shore and becomes obsessed with staying there. Her obsession with the dry world transforms itself into an obsession with the prince. She is madly in love with him. Her father finds out about it and also finds her secret grotto. When he smashes all this human stuff which means so much to her, she goes off to see the Sea Witch, Ursala, for help.

"The Sea Witch tells her that the only way to get what she wants is to become a

(continued on page 65)

LETTERING

Personal replies are impossible. Other fans & advertisers may contact readers whose letters are printed here. To **avoid** this, mark your letter "Please Withhold My Address." Otherwise, we retain the option to publish your address. Write:
COMICS SCENE
475 Park Avenue South, 8th Floor,
New York, NY 10016

. . . It was with considerable surprise and disappointment that I read Jerry Ordway's negative comments on our collaboration in his recent interview in your magazine (CSQ #3).

"Frustration" and "cop-outs," of course, are generally in the eye of the beholder, and if Jerry chooses to like my *Infinity, Inc.* #1-10 storyline about as much as I like his chin on the current Superman, that's his right.

I'm only sorry that not only does he seem not to have enjoyed our several years of collaboration anywhere near as much as I did, but that he suddenly feels obliged to bring the matter up for print nearly four years after we last worked together on a story.

Still, for the record, I feel reluctantly obliged to point out a few facts which, I believe, would bear up under any kind of intelligent retroactive scrutiny:

(1) Besides being writer of *All-Star Squadron* and *Infinity, Inc.* I had editorial functions to perform during most of our collaborative period, and thus can't even begin to feel I was out of line in asking for artistic changes—in point of fact, Jerry was required to do very, very little redrawing during that entire period.

(2) While admittedly many details of "The Generations Saga" in *Infinity* #1-10 were made up as we rolled along, there was a threadline (which perhaps Jerry just didn't see) which was consistent from beginning to end, running through the JSA not trusting the Infinitors' judgment and having to be saved by them, the Ultra-Humanite's plot which went from start to finish, the original Brain Wave's involvement and death, and various other items.

(3) Far from giving Jerry any sizable objective reason to feel that he was "never going to be able to please that man," I at least tried to make 'im aware from start to last of my admiration for both Jerry's work *and* for the professionalism he then displayed. Obviously, I failed miserably to get my feelings across, for whatever combination of reasons—but still, that admiration was high indeed during that 1981-1985 period, as nearly anyone who knew me then can attest!

As evidence: If I had *not* felt that way, Jerry would not have been penciller of both *All-Star* and *Infinity* for precisely as long as he wished to be, not one moment more or less. I was sorry to see him leave each book in turn—and much of what he did on both titles (including costumes for literally dozens of Golden Age heroes on which we labored together, about which I make no apologies for being "picky," after decades of inconsistent and uncaring treatment by other post-Julie Schwartz editors) is still used by me as the standard reference in working with other artists; just ask Todd McFarlane or Vince Argondezzi or Arvell Jones or Ron Harris or whomever.

If Jerry feels I didn't genuflect in his direction quite often enough, I cannot say he is wrong—but I submit sincerely and regretfully that this is a misjudgment on his part.

For my own part, as he must well know from our amiable phone discussions recently on a possible Superman/Captain Marvel teaming-up (conversations which must have been taking place around the same time as his COMICS SCENE interview), as well as my eagerness to include a page of his and Mike Machlan's art in 1988's *Infinity, Inc. Annual*, I remain a great fan of Jerry's artwork, and I look on his comments in the interview as being a temporary lapse in taste such as we all make from time to time, myself definitely included.

Jerry has had his say—now I've reluctantly had mine—and I would like to think the matter can rest there. No winners, no losers. . . no villains, and definitely no heroes. I've never wished him anything but good luck, from first to last.

Roy Thomas
California

. . . Several years ago, a new magazine about comics and related fields appeared on newsstands and in comic shops all over the nation. The magazine combined articles about not only superhero comics, but also about the older Warner Bros. characters and such films as *The Secret of Nimh*. There were interviews with the usuals such as Jack Kirby, George Perez and John Byrne, but there were also features on people such as Carl Barks and Chuck Jones, who are sometimes overlooked in this world of kiddie-bore, page-after-page-of-fight-scenes-when-will-it-end comics.

Today I found that magazine again, and its name is COMICS SCENE. I still find that it contains the same tasteful mixture of entrees and side dishes, with the exact portion of dessert needed to round everything out. The meat of the comics industry, unfortunately, is superheroes—some of the titles are good, but most aren't worth bothering with. All the same, your coverage of the genre seems adequate, and I may have been prompted by your Todd McFarlane/David Michelinie *Spider-Man* article to pick up an issue of that comic, something that I haven't done in a number of years. Likewise, the Chuck Jones interview was very much worth reading. It didn't sell me on anything that I haven't been sold on since I was a kid, but it did add to the insight that I have into the man and his work. I got much the same thing from the interview with Howard Chaykin, who, in

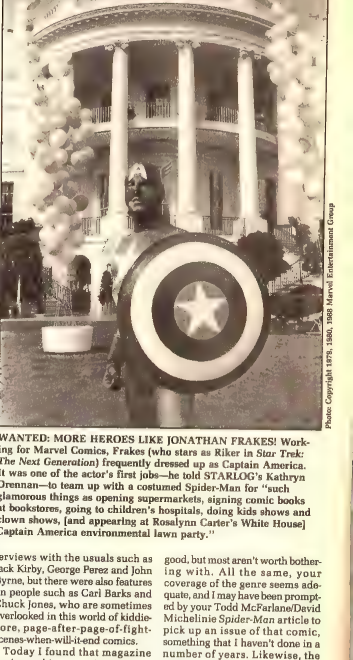


Photo: Copyright 1979, 1980, 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group

WANTED: MORE HEROES LIKE JONATHAN FRAKES! Working for Marvel Comics, Frakes (who stars as Riker in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) frequently dressed up as Captain America. It was one of the actor's first jobs—he told STARLOG's Kathryn Drennan—to team up with a costumed Spider-Man for "such glamorous things as opening supermarkets, signing comic books at bookstores, going to children's hospitals, doing kids shows and clown shows, [and appearing at Rosalynn Carter's White House] Captain America environmental lawn party."

some ways, reminds me of Chuck Jones. Not so much the work itself as just the attitude he takes about it: Please yourself, and chances are someone else will like your work too.

I can't say that I was totally pleased with the issue though. I felt that the six pages devoted to the *Legion*'s 30th anniversary was wasted. We didn't learn a whole lot that wasn't already common knowledge, and there were entirely too many cover reproductions that we're all well acquainted with, having been exposed to them with every other *Legion* article we've read in the past. The space would have been better used on the *Flash Gordon* or *Shadow* articles.

Back to the plus side for the moment, it was nice reading about all the comic characters which are being planned for live-action films, though I must admit dismay in some of the others that are going into animation. Most of the animation today is barely a shadow of such old Disney features as *Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs*, although Marvel Productions seems to come closest to the old Disney magic.

All in all, it would appear that you've got a winning magazine on your hands. Again. The only real problem that I can foresee is the length of time between issues. With monthly, and even weekly comic-related magazines on the market, some people aren't going to hold out for three months to wait on you, especially the younger crowd who are only interested in whether or not the Thing is stronger than the Hulk. In any event, I'll continue to be here with each new issue hoping to see improvement from one to the other.

Stan Johnston
P.O. Box 842
Yazoo City, MS 39194

...Everything in COMICS SCENE #2 was great, but I especially enjoyed the interviews with Howard Chaykin and Peter David. I'm glad that Howard is returning to his greatest creation, although I think that the present *Blackhawk* mini-series is the best work he has ever done. Too bad he didn't stay on *The Shadow* and do the recent *Doc Savage* mini-series, he seems to have a real talent for reviving older characters. As for Peter David, this man is quickly becoming my favorite writer in comics. The work he has done on *Peter Parker* and the *Hulk* has been some of the best stuff Marvel has put out in years. I had no interest in *The Phantom*, but after finding out that Peter is writing it, I'm sure it will be very good. I can't wait to see it.

Kevin Hall
P.O. Box 792
Castlewood, VA 24224

...The Chuck Jones article was interesting, I have admired his work for years and believe him to be one of the greatest directors. However, the article does an injustice to Bob Clampett, who directed at least 11 *Bugs Bunny* cartoons, not four, as you stated. [See Leonard Maltin's *Of Mice and Magic*].

I believe Clampett did understand Bugs more than anyone. He knew Bugs was meant to be entertaining and that breaking the rules was more fun than obeying them. Having Bugs as the "heavy" or fool was a revelation. That's the reason Jones' treatment of Daffy Duck was appealing. As the fool, he treated Daffy more as a hero ("Great Piggy Bank Robbery," "Book Revue"), which is another revelation, to someone who admired Jones' work for so long.

Clampett's wildness is often mistaken for being "off model" or out of control. To the contrary, he was very much in control, being more daring and experimental with his cartoons. There are many places where Clampett used sophisticated film techniques such as subliminal color switching, jump cutting to reinforce a gag, surrealism, etc. I don't mean to downgrade Jones' directors, just give Bob his due. Having worked as a storyboard and layout artist for John Kricfalusi's unit at the Bakshi studio, I have a new appreciation for Clampett's work. On *Mighty Mouse*, we tried to capture the same spirit that Warner's best cartoons have. The reviews have been good so far. Even Chuck Jones liked it.

It would be nice to see you do a piece on Kricfalusi. His contributions to *Mighty Mouse* gives it a certain quality that makes it unique, and I think he will be a force to be reckoned with; although he had help (yours truly) from many talented people. "Eluy and the Tree Weasels," "Night of the Bat-Bat," and "Night on Bald Pate" are three of the most successful of John's episodes.

Here's wishing you luck and success from a fellow fan.

Jim Smith
Animator, Bakshi Studio
Los Angeles, CA

...First of all, let me say that your editorial in COMICS SCENE #2 was great! It inspired me to write to you. I would have written after reading #1, but I didn't read the editorial, still haven't, sorry. But I do stress that if I had known that it was a "test-the-waters, really-iffy-but-why-not-try-it" issue, you would have heard from me sooner.

The format is great! This mag will go!!! The *only* thing I would like to see is more Arthur Adams. Do something on him. He's the best comic artist there is. Undisputed! Well!!? Please! Oh, Come oonnnn!

Henry Munoz
Route 1 Box 103C
Teague, TX 75860

...I am somewhat late in writing to you and there's a reason for that: I had no advance notice that COMICS SCENE was being brought back on an ongoing basis, so I was caught completely by surprise when the second issue went on sale at January's end. Furthermore, I didn't have any money with me when I encountered that second issue at a local bookstore, and when I did bring $3.50 with me to that store, they had sold out.

Fortunately, I came across the second issue at another store. I love this issue, especially the pieces about *Flaming Carrot* (I've read it three or four times and it has made me laugh *every* time!) and *Rocketeer* (can't wait to see the movie!).

For future issues, please try to have interviews with people like Lynn Johnston (*For Better or Worse*), Berke Breathed (*Bloom County*), Mort Walker (*Beetle Bailey*), Johnny Hart (B.C.), Sergio Aragones (Groo), Gary Larson (*The Far Side*), Art Samson (*Born Loser*), Bill Hoest (*Lockhorns*) and articles about *Fish Police*, DC's *New Guardians*, Archie Comics' *Madhouse* and *Turok, Son of Stone*.

Michael Skelley
3827 Fifth Avenue
Altoona, PA 16602

...I am glad that you have decided to reinstate this publication. It will be a welcome addition to newsstands. I hope it sells so well, you make it monthly. The recent attempts by other publishers were dismal. *Four Color* was a lackluster periodical that I had no idea whom they thought they appealed to. The contents seemed directed at a very unknowledgeable reader. Ridiculous! The reader will become much more informed when the material you print has substance to it. Please do not repeat this mistake.

Paul Rogus
660 S. Cochran Avenue, #201
Los Angeles, CA 90036

...Issue #3 of COMICS SCENE QUARTERLY is the first I have been able to obtain over here, so you'll have to accept a belated "welcome back" from me. Happily, the new incarnation is every bit as good! Now, if only some enterprising person could revive *The Comic Reader*, all would once again be right with fandom.

Others have already said this, but it warrants repeating. The layouts are excellent, the whole magazine has a most pleasing appearance. My only complaint in this regard might be that the cover looks a little crowded. STARLOG had this problem until a little while ago; perhaps you could look into this area with COMICS SCENE, also. The features in issue #3 were all of interest, but I especially enjoyed the interview with Jerry Ordway. The look at the varied pieces of artwork is appreciated. You should, however, have credited Dave Gibbons, as well as Jerry, for the Superman il-

HEY THERE! I EVER WONDER WHO THEY'RE GOING TO GET TO PLAY BATMAN IN THE UPCOMING FILM?--
--ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER?..
I BREAK YOU HEADBONE!
TIMOTHY DALTON?...
THE NAME IS MAN...
BAT MAN
CLINT EASTWOOD?...
GO AHEAD, PUNK, MAKE MY NIGHT.
BAT-BOOKA MAGNUM
KEEP WATCHING!
Art: Mike Fisher

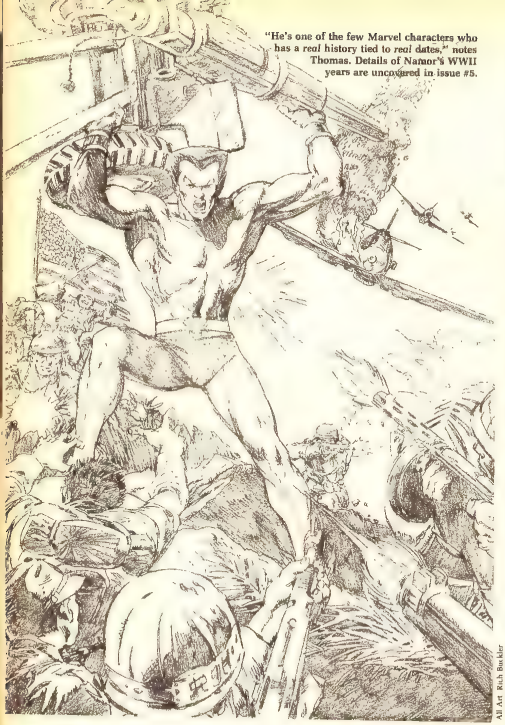
lustration at the top left of page 40. One thing I would like to ask, and I hope you don't mind my taking advantage of your magazine like this, is can any of your readers help me to obtain a copy of the *Time* magazine reproduced here? Back issues are virtually impossible to obtain over here and, as a Superman fan, I would very much like to read it.

Dale Coe
56 Whitecross Road
Warrington, Cheshire
WA5 1LR, England

...It was really interesting to finally find a magazine about the comics scene and not just comics collecting. As the artist/writer/publisher of my own comic book, I am always interested in what's going on in the comics "world." I am particularly intrigued by articles about other self-publishers.

The *Flaming Carrot* article was outstanding, as was the spectacular Todd McFarlane cover; Spidey looks great on yellow. Keep this extraordinary magazine going; there's a real need for it.

Lance A. Seibel
Box 294
Goodrich, ND 58444



"He's one of the few Marvel characters who has a *real* history tied to *real* dates," notes Thomas. Details of Namor's WWII years are uncovered in issue #5.

All Art: Rich Buckler

Imperius Rex Revisited

By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

It's like sitting down with the Sub-Mariner as he tells you his story, first hand," says artist Rich Buckler of *Saga of the Sub-Mariner*, Marvel's 12-issue history of the character which begins this month.

Buckler notes that writers Roy & Dann Thomas are telling the story in the first person. "Just the fact that the story is in Sub-Mariner's voice makes it different," Buckler explains.

Roy Thomas says the project was his idea. "I went to Mike Higgins—the editor I was doing most things at Marvel with, before he went freelance—and suggested a series that wouldn't be tied down to anybody else's continuity, one where I would be on my own. The Sub-Mariner came to mind, because he has always been a character I've enjoyed.

"My interest in him dates from my teenage years when I began reading his stories in the late 1940s and 1950s," Thomas recalls. "In addition, I got to know [Sub-Mariner creator] Bill Everett really well in the late 1960s when he and I roomed together for a while."

The decision was made to treat the series as a history of the Sub-Mariner, Prince Namor, from his birth until his latest adventures. "He's one of the few Marvel characters who has a real history tied to real dates -born in the 1920s, came to the surface in 1939, fought in WWII, came back in the '50s and '60s," Thomas explains. "We're going to have to fudge the dates toward the end of the 12 issues, in order not to date other characters like Johnny Storm."

Writing a history of a character in comic-book form -as opposed to a straightforward action-adventure story -can present problems for both the writers and artist. How do you avoid a textbook approach? How do you resolve the many inconsistencies in almost 50 years of publishing history?

Surprisingly, Thomas says there were only a few problems of that nature that arose. One of the biggest involved a wrong date given in an earlier Sub-Mariner series.

"In the most recent series, a date of 1952 was given for his return to New York City," the writer explains. "That was wrong, because it was previously established that he was in Atlantis from 1949 to 1955 [when his comic-book series was revived]. So, we decided that since that date was given by a sort of 'bubble-headed blonde reporter,' it was just wrong."

The other problems, according to Thomas, were those of appropriately telescoping the incidents of the Sub-Mariner's life. As Thomas tells it, Namor

Roy & Dann Thomas and Rich Buckler chronicle the life of Prince Namor of Atlantis, the "Saga of the Sub-Mariner."

won't be born until the first issue's end; his teenage years (using some Everett stories from the 1950s) are covered in the second book. From there, the established career of the Avenging Son is explored.

Thomas feels that they had to give "short shrift" to the original Human Torch/Sub-Mariner battles (except for the first one). He also says the Sub-Mariner's post-war crime-fighter years are barely touched on. "I was pretty nostalgic about those stories—since they were the ones I read as a kid," Thomas remarks, "but, looking at them now, I realize how *terrible* they were."

The sixth issue ends with Namor's second return to New York as an amnesiac, setting up the events of *Fantastic Four* #4. The series' second half follows the "Marvel Age" Sub-Mariner to today.

"Our original plan was to have the first eight issues cover the character's pre-Marvel history, but I decided that wouldn't work—we had to get the Marvel Age started *sooner*," Thomas notes.

The historical aspect of this series is no particular problem for Rich Buckler. "Storytelling is my main interest in comics—otherwise, I would be doing advertising or something," he chuckles. "That's the challenge, not the problem. Every comic book page presents challenges, that's part of the comic artist's job—facing those challenges and finding answers.

"Because of the epic sweep, most of the series has been broken down into scenes, in a general way by Roy in the plot, then further into specifics by me. Some of the specifics were suggested by Roy, in other cases, I used my own judgment. The scenes are like sketches of what happened," Buckler explains.

"Namor has always been an unusual character," Roy Thomas explains, "no costume, not a villain, not a hero."

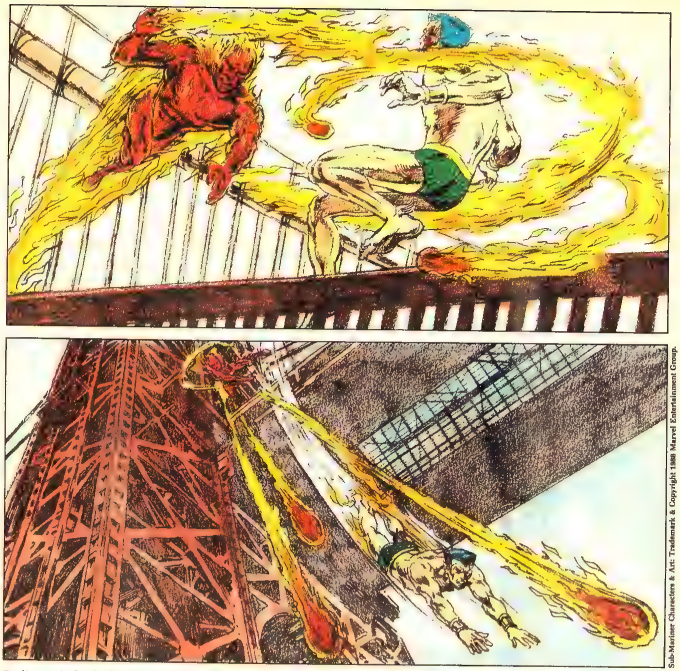
"Since we are, in a sense, *re*defining and re-establishing the Sub-Mariner, I thought it was best to handle it in a very serious manner—as opposed to stylized and cartoony. That was in the plots given me and we talked about it ahead of time. It's a grim story—the Sub-Mariner has had a rather tragic life."

Part of that realistic feel is a slight redesign of Namor's appearance—an attempt to regain the original look without offending today's fans.

"The fans will now see Sub-Mariner as they haven't before—a standardized look that hopefully Marvel will keep," Buckler announces. "He doesn't one day look like a muscle-man with a short hairdo who just happens to have pointy ears and weird eyebrows, or like a superhero in a green bathing suit. He has a distinctive look now, a little closer to what Bill Everett created, particularly the shape of the head. I found a way to make it work realistically."

Another challenge faced by artist Buckler was making the undersea world real. "That world was *never* real enough," he argues. "Each artist would grope with a few of the problems, but never answer all of them satisfactorily. For instance, why do buildings in Atlantis have doors and windows? I figure that's practical because they would want to control the interior environment—the water temperature, for example. They would also want to keep the pests out. Who wants little fish swimming around their head while they're reading? There are dangerous creatures down there, too.

"There's a problem of what to leave out as well," when handling the undersea scenes, he notes. "There should be bubbles coming out of people's mouths whenever they talk underwater, but you



Sub-Mariner Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group.

Battling again for the first time, Namor recalls his early conflicts with the original Torch.

can't have a serious dialogue scene that way.

"And what about light sources? I assume they have an equivalent to electricity—but just for show, I've got a 'torch' on a stand, something their scientists have created. It's not really fire, but it bubbles with light. It also serves to remind the reader, because of the bubbles, that the scene is underwater—instead of the streaks that Everett put in."

Thomas says that Sub-Mariner owes much of his long life to the interest of the creators who have worked on the character (and to a twist of media fate), rather than to any sales strength of his own.

"Sub-Mariner was always the weakest of Timely's big three, saleswise," the writer explains. "The lack of costume and the unusual background probably hurt. Even in the '50s when he lasted longer than Captain America and the Torch, he was probably selling no better—likely worse—than the other two."

The 1950s *Sub-Mariner* ran longer than its counterparts due to a TV option, Thomas says, quoting a story Everett once told him. The title was continued in order to keep the character in print while negotiations wore on. "We owe a couple of good years' worth of Sub-Mariner to a TV series that never happened," Thomas laughs.

But why did the creators love Namor so? Why did Stan Lee bring him back into the Marvel Universe so early?

"To Stan, it was probably the memory of the Sub-Mariner/Torch fights that caused him to use the character so early on," Roy Thomas speculates, "particularly once he used the Torch as a revised character in the Fantastic Four. In addition, Namor has always been an unusual character—no costume, not a villain, not a hero—a nationalist, created in a time when nationalism was on the rise. It's remarkable that he was so successful in the early years when most of the time he was fighting the U.S. government. His background—halfbreed outsider, hothead—was unique when he started; it has been used by others since, but he's the original."

That originality won't be lost in the new series, according to Rich Buckler. "We have made a definite effort to play the stories as new, even though they're historical. We're treating it as though everything that has been published before was hearsay, but this is the Sub-Mariner's own version. It's like the Sub-Mariner is starting over." ■

SPIDER-MAN
The Movie

The Definite Maybe

By KYLE COUNTS

For the wondrous wall-crawler, Dr. Octopus, Mysterio and the Green Goblin were easier to beat than studio squabbles.

Take heart, web-slinger fans, *Spider-Man: The Movie*, is coming. Not in time to stuff your holiday stocking, as was originally promised by Cannon Films, but in March 1989. *Maybe.*

Ever since Marvel Comics sold the Cannon Group the rights to two of their most popular comic-book characters, Spider-Man and Captain America, Menahem Golan, head of Cannon, has been promising to deliver big-screen treatments of both heroes. Start-up dates were announced in the Hollywood trades, scripts were prepared and pre-production was begun. Yet, to date, *neither* project has generated a single frame of footage, leading fans to wonder if the movies were ever more than a gleam in Cannon's eye.

Spider-Man, to be directed by Albert (*The Sword and the Sorcerer*) Pyun from a script by writer/actor Don Michael Paul (cast in the forthcoming *Heartbreak Hotel*), was supposed to go before the cameras at De Laurentiis Entertainment Group's Wilmington, North Carolina, studios on March 29, with a release planned for Christmas 1988. But as of the second week in May, Pyun—set to helm both *Spider-Man* and the "sequel" to *Masters of the Universe*—had just left for North Carolina to scout locations for. . . *Cyborg*???

Pyun, who's probably as frustrated by the numerous delays in starting the film as Peter Parker's legion of followers, is doing his best to get a grip on the madness of it all. *Spider-Man* was to be his next project (his most recent effort, *Alien From L.A.*, was done as a "favor" to Cannon), then *Heatseeker*, the unofficial sequel to *Masters of the Universe* that

Spidey shows an unfortunate villain what he would like to do to those responsible for holding up his movie.
Art: Todd McFarlane

evolved when negotiations with Mattel, owners of the *Masters* characters, collapsed. Both would be shot at DEG using the same crews, making it a highly cost-efficient back-to-back operation.

Then, *Heatseeker*—renamed *Cyborg*, because the title elicited a stronger response from the foreign movie distributors who loved *RoboCop*—heated up and *Spider-Man* was put on hold. But when Tim Burton's *Batman* film went into pre-production (CSQ #3), Cannon, not wanting the Caped Crusader to beat them out of the starting gate, asked Pyun to give Cyborg a rest and turn his thoughts back to the wall-crawler. Pyun, an astonishingly soft-spoken and even-tempered man for a Hollywood hyphenate, politely explained that *Spider-Man* was nowhere near ready to roll, even though sets were under construction and Fantasy II was already in the R&D stage as far as the special effects. Cannon relented and Pyun went back to prepping *Cyborg*.

As is by now well known, New World Pictures purchased Marvel Comics in 1986 for $50 million, somehow unaware that the film rights to neither Spider-Man nor Captain America were part of the package. The lawsuits and counter-suits began to fly almost as soon as New World learned that Cannon was making a film based on Spider-Man's exploits. Spider-Man co-creator Stan Lee submitted a treatment for the film (see sidebar); screenwriter Chris (*Gremlins*) Columbus (STARLOG #86, 111) was said to be writing the script. Cannon took out ads in the trades announcing that Tobe (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*) Hooper (STARLOG #108) was on deck to direct, then handed the reigns to Joseph (*Missing in Action*) Zito, along with a $15 million budget (STARLOG #104). By the time the stencil of Zito's name had dried on the back of the director's chair, he was out and on to another project—and *Spider-Man* had been relegated to the shelf.

New World allegedly tried to abort the project by claiming that Cannon had violated their contract. Cannon, in turn, maintained that they had abided to the letter of the contract and had not violated any of the agreed-to terms. In February, a bus driver working for Cannon during the Los Angeles American Film Market tipped off a reporter that *Spider-Man* was in trouble and that the production had been permanently stalled due to New World's aggressive litigation.

Pyun isn't particularly interested in sorting through the myriad rumors surrounding *Spider-Man* or going on record as a spokesman for Cannon regarding their ongoing legal skirmishes. He did say, however, that it was his impression that "New World sent out a letter saying their intention was to search for a breach in their contractual arrangement. But, considering the financial shape New World is in at the moment, I don't think they're in a position to press any of the suits." As for that mysterious bus driver, Pyun thinks he might have been talking about the *Masters* sequel or perhaps the planned *Captain America* movie, rumored to be a joint production between New World and Cannon, which is currently embroiled in a tangled web of its own.

The filmmaker, however, *will* go on record as saying that the $5.5 million *Spider-Man* is due to begin filming in late August, with exteriors to be shot in Atlanta and Montreal and web-swinging scenes on DEG's New York backlot, built for *Year of the Dragon*. March 1989 is the tentative release date. Sets by Chester (*Extremities*) Kazcenski are currently being built (an advance photo of Peter Parker's room shows a U-2 poster and pictures of the solar system on the wall), wardrobe by Heidi Kazcenski is in progress, Greg (*Lost Boys*) Cannom is at work on special makeups ("He's going for the Academy Award on this one," Pyun remarks) and casting will be finalized when *Cyborg* wraps. Marvel, however, has both script and cast approval. In the meantime, Cannon's current money woes won't impact on the production, as far as Pyun can tell, nor will New World's latest legal maneuver—said to be a squabble over TV rights to the film.

Pyun reveals he has taken regular meetings with Lee and Margaret Loesch, president of Marvel Productions, since January 1988, hoping to devise a script for *Spider-Man* that would satisfy all parties involved. The three would go over Don Michael Paul's script, make detailed

notes, then Pyun would deliver the written feedback to Paul, who made revisions based on their combined comments.

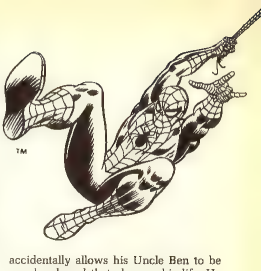
When Cannon brought a new script to Marvel last November, with another writer attached, it had been some three years since Cannon began developing the project. Pyun wasn't particularly pleased with the script, feeling that it was just another special effects clone in the *Superman* vein. He decided to give Paul, a fledgling screenwriter who had been regularly sending him original scripts, a crack at bringing the Spider-Man legend to the screen. Although New World recently pulled the plug on communications between Pyun and Marvel Productions, Pyun says that the script is now in final draft form.

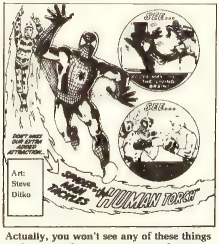
Why is he the right man to direct *Spider-Man*? "I was one of those people who actually grew up with him," Pyun says. "For about three solid years, I was heavily into Spider-Man—I had the poster on the wall, the whole bit. I know most purists out there probably think we're going to screw it up, but I'm hoping they'll see it and go, 'Whoa,' that it's the movie they would have made. Paul is a big fan, too, and has a good feel for Peter Parker's world. He's only 24, so he can still relate to that frame of mind. Our feeling is that everyone seems to be fairly satisfied as to where the script stands at the moment."

This version of Spider-Man will be "the first hour of *Superman*" in Pyun's words, meaning that it will concentrate on the creation of the web-slinger, pre-J. Jonah Jameson. "Spider-Man is a psychological superhero, and our film is about a young boy who is not yet mature enough to understand the gift he has been given. I mean, what would *you* do if you were suddenly able to shoot webbing and crawl up walls and you could use your powers for wealth and fame?"

Pyun plans to sign a young actor to play the titular character. "We want a guy the actual age, not someone who's trying to play 17. He'll be an unknown, most likely, and he'll have to go through a certain period of training for the film, since much of the character is movement and physical agility.

"Peter grows up during the film," Pyun explains. "He's *not* the wise-cracking, overconfident superhero you saw later in the comic. Because of his selfishness, he accidentally allows his Uncle Ben to be murdered, and that changes his life. He recognizes that with great powers come great responsibility, and that's where our film ends. The final shot is of him on the dock at dawn, putting on his hood, firing his webbing at the Brooklyn Bridge and swinging across the water—it's really the *beginning* of the Spider-Man legend."





Actually, you won't see any of these things in the movie, but Pyun promises that you *will* see an honest translation of the web-slinger's early days.

Principal among the difficulties presented by adapting Spider-Man to the screen was the inevitable antagonist of the piece. There were plenty of evil characters who could have been lifted from the comic, such as the Green Goblin or Dr. Octopus, but Pyun felt it might be just as exciting to dream up a brand *new* arch-enemy to square off against Spidey.

"Mainly, we had to sort out just how fantastic we wanted to get with the villain," remarks Pyun. "Since we decided ours would be a film that operated

(continued on page 60)

"Spider-Man: The Disappointment?"

One of his greatest characters may finally be heading to the silver screen, yet Stan Lee can find "very little that's good" to say about the progress of *Spider-Man: The Movie*. Although Lee is a consultant on the Cannon film, he still works for that studio's rival, New World Pictures, as head of Marvel Productions. Consequently, "I'm not able to work on the project as smoothly and as well as I would like to," he confesses. "I really don't know how it's going to end up, whether Cannon will do it or not.

"One thing that bothers me is that I've seen the script that Cannon wants to go with, and I really don't feel that it's all that good," Lee admits. "Now, that, of course, was a first draft script that I read, and it may have undergone many changes since I've last seen it. I hope."

Initially, Lee had even provided the studio with a story outline, now abandoned, "which I think would have worked *perfectly*." Involving the odious Dr. Octopus as Spidey's offensive opponent, Lee's treatment, he notes, "would have been a much more expensive movie. I don't believe they either want or are in a position to spend as much as that movie would have cost."

Still, just to make Spider-Man work on screen, Lee explains that "he must be done the way he's done in the comic books. There has to be really finely-honed characterization, there has to be an element of humor, and it has to be incredibly realistic. It sounds simple, but it seems to be hard for many of the scriptwriters and directors to either comprehend or execute. It's very strange because—I've thought about this so many times—the style of the first Superman movie was very similar to the style of the Spider-Man comics, except for Lex Luthor, who was done much more broadly than we would do the villain. I used to think how ironic it is that if we ever did a movie just the way *Spider-Man* should be done, people might think we're aping the Superman movie style.

The awesome Dr. Octopus may have menaced the wall-crawler in Stan Lee's treatment, but Spidey's screen scoundrel, says director Albert Pyun, will "operate more on the human level."

"It's a shame because there are so many wonderful things that could be done with our characters, and somehow there's always something that happens to stop the project from being done the right way." But, says Stan Lee, "life is a little bit like a comic book. Things always manage to work out in the end. So, I'll just keep on hoping."

—*Daniel Dickholtz*

Spider-Man Characters & Art: Trademarks & Copyright 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group

Art: Keith Maguire/Joe Rubinstein

Misfits & Mystics

J.M. DeMatteis leads the way on a trail that winds from the Justice League's headquarters through supernatural realms to that most terrifying of territories—Brooklyn.

By T.L. JOHNS

At 34, J.M. DeMatteis is at a crossroads in his career. He currently has a financial success with *Justice League International* and recently received critical commendations for *Blood: A Tale* and the *JLI* spin-off mini-series *Martian Manhunter*.

But he's also an author with roots in DC's old horror titles who wants to channel his talents into other mediums.

These days, DeMatteis muses over his first sales to Marvel's now-defunct *Crazy* magazine (one of several *Mad* carbons) during the late '70s, noting several "embarrassing pieces" before he finally began selling scripts to DC's *House of Mystery* and *House of Secrets* in 1977.

After a year off, he started selling once again in 1979, penning and "fixing up" various superhero titles. DeMatteis speaks with some chagrin about those days when he presented characters "full of breast-beating and angst," almost completely opposite of the silliness which fills the monthly pages of *JLI*.

"It's easy to write *Justice League*," he explains, "because it's like they're saying, 'OK, have fun, stick in 150 bad jokes.' And as Andy Helfer always says, 'If you go too far, I'll take it out.' "

DeMatteis only takes two days to deliver the yocks and socks because he wants "to keep it spontaneous and to be as silly as I can."

DeMatteis credits plotter Keith Giffen and editor Helfer for setting the tone of *Justice League* and says he sometimes feels like he's just "along for the ride," to have fun with it.

"The very first issue, Keith had already scripted and I was just brought in to play with it and revise. I picked up on the tone he wanted and I said, 'OK, this is what they want? I'll give you as many bad jokes as anybody.'

"Keith sets it all up and draws these great little layouts that look like Harvey Kurtzman's stuff and suggests dialogue. If they're great jokes and great dialogue, I keep it in. There'll be entire pages where I change *everything*; some pages I leave *exactly* as Keith wrote it; and others will be half-and-half."

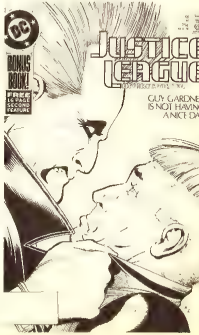
Although DeMatteis claims he could probably write his entire script for *Justice League International* in one day, he prefers to write it over the course of two.

"And Andy *wants* it that way. He said to keep it spontaneous and to just let the stuff come out. I get into my silly consciousness and I try to be as silly as I possibly can," the writer reveals. "I can't tell jokes, but I can write about a group of friends just goofing around."

Some serious fans and other professionals have found that light-hearted approach not to their taste, and while DeMatteis understands their feelings, he asks them to understand the nature of *Justice League*.

"I don't have that much connection with what the *die-hard* fans are thinking, but fans are the ones buying it. It's currently one of DC's bestselling comics. Most of the pros from the old school have been upset by it because whoever walks through that door and enters the pages of the *Justice League*, it's going to be wacky. That's why the book is so successful.

"People who take their comics very



Art: Keith Maguire/Joe Rubinstein

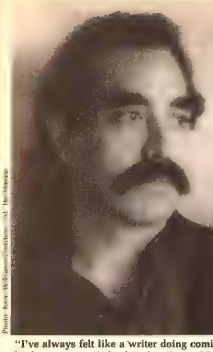


Photo: Jerry Williamson/Timelines — © Jim Shaw

"I've always felt like a writer doing comic books, not a comic-book writer," says J.M. DeMatteis. "There are a great many things I hope and intend to do."

seriously will be upset by it," he concedes. "But many more people have obviously responded to it. I even told Andy, as writer of the *Martian Manhunter* miniseries, I was very upset at the way Jonn Jonzz is being portrayed in *Justice League*. That's the kind of complaint you get."

Originally, DeMatteis admits, he *didn't* want the *JLI* assignment. What swayed him was the chance to work with Giffen and Helfer. DeMatteis even tried to quit once, but admits that the book is easy work that pays quite well in royalties, while giving him a chance to make some fans laugh.

"I would be an idiot not to do it," he remarks.

As for the future, DeMatteis says he plans to have fun with the newest character to join the team, Hawkman.

"Hawkman is so funny because in the midst of all this silliness, he is serious. This is the one guy *more* serious than Batman, so he's funny in his own way."

Also, *JLI* fans will soon discover two spin-offs—separate series featuring Mister Miracle and Dr. Fate, both to premiere this fall.

While DeMatteis' *Martian Manhunter* was what he considers a very "dark" piece and not a true *JLI* spin-off, *Mister Miracle* will have the same "light" tone DeMatteis uses on the parent title.

Mister Miracle, on which he'll team with British artist Ian (*Millennium*) Gibson, will contain "lots of humor." He even hesitantly refers to it as the first "superhero sitcom." But, he hastens to add, the stories will have a serious side.

He sees the book as days in the life of Scott Free and his wife, Big Barda, and their continued struggle to lead a normal suburban life amid visits from superhuman relatives and friends.

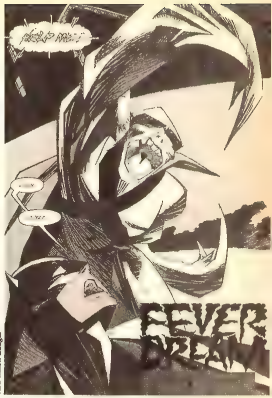
Relationships will play a large part of the storyline, and DeMatteis plans to emphasize how after all the personal tragedies Mister Miracle and his wife have been through, they have a marriage which "can't be shattered." They "honestly just want to settle down and live the most natural life they can. They want nothing more than to have a backyard barbeque, but their relatives keep showing up and causing these crazy, silly things to happen around them. In that way, it's like *Bewitched*. Also, I want to prove you can talk about serious subjects, like their past and their relationships, in a light way."

Drawn by Shawn (*Omega Men*) McManus, the new *Dr. Fate* series will be a change for those who read DeMatteis' original mini-series. DeMatteis notes that the earlier mini-series came out "a lot darker" and more serious than he wanted and blames some personal problems he was having at the time.

This go-round, situations of stellar importance will still be on hand, but characterizations will be first and foremost. And, as with *Mister Miracle*, humor will play a part as well.

"You'll see Nabu trying to become more human, and gaining a sense of humor will be one of the ways," the writer says. "You'll see him watching David Letterman and exhibiting some seemingly strange behavior. But it will be up to the reader to decide if the behavior is strange or if he's performing these silly actions perfectly for effect."

Dr. Fate is also expected to get *a bit* mystical, which is nothing new for DeMatteis who has been critically ac-



Art: Mark Badger

Like many others, J.M. DeMatteis, the writer of the *Martian Manhunter* miniseries, resented the way scripter J.M. DeMatteis treated such a venerable character in *JLI*.

Art: Shawn McManus

Really, once he gets his own solo book this fall, Dr. Fate is going to be much wackier than he has ever been before.

All Justice League: Dr. Fate, Martian Manhunter, Mr. Miracle Characters & Art, Trademark & Copyright 1988 DC Comics Inc.
Art Shawn McManus

Dr. Fate will be curing mystic madness monthly, but DeMatteis promises that his magical medicine won't be as bitter a pill as the one prescribed on his last house call.

insulated you are. As creators working at home, we know even less.

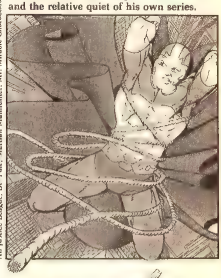
"The kind of material that is going to succeed [in the serious market] must appeal to an adult who wants a good book to read. That doesn't mean adults can't or even won't read superhero stories, but they're more apt to read things like *American Splendor*."

DeMatteis believes most of today's adult comics are actually aimed at 16-20 year olds, and contain a combination of simplistic stories and "smarmy sex with graphic violence." He even found himself wrestling with his conscience after the publication of a six-part Spider-Man story he wrote in which Kraven the Hunter ultimately commits suicide.

"I had many letters from suicide prevention groups after that one. I had trouble sleeping for a while because I kept thinking things like 'Does the world need an adult Spider-Man story?' I don't write to spread darkness. I think you have to crawl through the darkness to get to the

(continued on page 67)

If he can get out of this, you can bet that Mister Miracle will escape to the suburbs and the relative quiet of his own series.



Art Keith Maguire/Joe Rubinstein

Art Keith Maguire/Joe Rubinstein

claimed for his dabblings in the mystical: with such works as *Greenberg, the Vampire*, the story of a Jewish writer from Brooklyn who just happens to be a vampire; the fairy tale of *Moonshadow*, which takes the reader through the first part of the life of a young adventurer; and most recently, *Blood: A Tale*, a different kind of dark fantasy which DeMatteis said is his most autobiographical work to date.

The collected books of *Blood* should hit direct sales stores this fall with the collected *Moonshadow* to follow later.

Blood did much better than DeMatteis thought it would do. It also forced him to deal with censorship, labeling and the other problems of writing a "serious" comic.

"I really don't know if anyone knows what the target audience is," he says. "In the last few years, books like *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* have been labeled as adult material. But I don't consider them adult. I think of more serious or critically acclaimed works like Art Speigelman's *Maus* and Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor* [as adult material]. I don't think the average adult is interested in superheroes. And we in the industry really know *less* than almost anybody about who our exact audience is; and the deeper into the industry you go, the more

After years of living like this, is it any wonder that all Big Barda and her husband want to do is "settle down and have a backyard barbecue"?

By WILL MURRAY

Who is... Prowler?

Beware! Tim Truman's master of murder and mayhem is delivering death to the dealers of doom one mini-series at a time!

A casual reader, leafing through a copy of Eclipse's *Prowler* series, might come away confused. And with good reason. With his slouch hat and greatcoat and twin .45 automatics, the Prowler resembles an older, crankier version of The Shadow. But The Shadow never wore a mask, nor was he accompanied by a reluctant young sidekick in superhero tights. And not even The Shadow's many layers of multiple identities were as convoluted as the Prowler's.

Writer/creator Tim (Scout) Truman explains that his character is not really inspired by The Shadow, but by one of that pulp hero's greatest rivals for Depression-era dimes, the Spider.

"The Spider was *much* more sinister than the other .45-toting pulp heroes," Truman remarks. "The Shadow is more of a holy avenger. The Spider might have laughed because he felt that laugh rising in him. From The Shadow, I get more that it was a device. But the Spider was really feeling this. He was diggin' it!"

Actually, three separate Prowlers inhabit the two mini-series which have so far been published. There is Leo Kragg, the original Prowler, his young protege, Scott Kida, who is in training to be the next Prowler, and in a weird bit of whimsy, there is the fictitious Prowler, private detective Doug Kirkland. Within the context of the Prowler mythos, the Doug Kirkland Prowler exists only in B movies and 1940s comic strips, all licensed by film mogul Leo Kragg, whom the world does not suspect is the real Prowler!

Although set in modern times, the Prowler is a vintage pre-World War II pulp and Saturday morning serial hero who has outlived the innocent days of his black-and-white films and foes. Although he's fond of spouting manic lines like "Death to those who bring death!" borrowed from Norvell Page's Spider novels, the Prowler's look is modeled after the Columbia serial version of the Spider, lacking only the white web lines of the mask. After being caught in the coils of the McCarthy era anti-Communist hearings, Leo Kragg retired from prowling, but has since taken under his wing a young, idealistic art student whom he is training to be the new Prowler, Scott Kida, who was named in tribute to

"Who is this man—and why does he like to scare people?" asks Tim Truman (pictured).

Photo: Courtesy Tim Truman.

Art: By & Copyright 1987 John K. Snyder III/Deane Hallo, Michel

Prowler Characters: Trademark: Timothy Truman, John K. Snyder III & Michael Price

Spider Cover Courtesy Will Murray

Looking for inspiration for the Prowler, Tim Truman got caught in the web of the Spider, a character who was "*much* more sinister than the other pulp heroes."

Golden Age *Airboy* artist Fred Kida.

It sounds more innocent than it is. Kragg is aging and embittered, kept alive only through an elixir vitae called the Dragon's Blood. He manipulates Scott Kida at every turn, even going so far as to throw out Scott's clothes so that Scott becomes dependent upon Kragg for the most basic necessities.

It's not a comfortable portrait of a classic hero. In fact, it's *deliberately* unsettling.

"If there were superheroes in real life," Truman explains, "I think that these avenger types would be the kind of people you wouldn't want to be in an elevator with. They would *have* to have some gears loose. I want that feeling to come across in the Prowler."

And it does. Leo Kragg is a repulsive, toadlike character whose high ideals have soured with the passing years. Even garbed as the Prowler, the ugliness that has overtaken his spirit shows clearly.

"Leo has become twisted," Truman admits. "His original motivations were selfish. He just wanted to get back at this boss who had fired him. He became involved in the union movement, and the more he got involved, the more good he saw he was doing. He confronted actual evils. In the '30s, the evils were a little more clear-cut than they are now. He started fighting Nazis and all this stuff, and he started feeling self-righteous. The more he waded into the blood and gunsmoke, the more twisted he became."

Originally a Wall Street whiz known as Leon Cragstein, Kragg lost his job and reputation during the 1929 Stock Market crash, and feeling betrayed by his employers, he got back at them by stealing their financial records and turning confidential information over to a trade union run by a friend. When his friend is murdered by anti-union thugs, Kragg first dons the mask and weapons of the Prowler, a name bestowed on him in tried-and-true fashion by newspaper scare headlines.

"Leo was sort of a Republican who became a populist who ultimately became a bit of a fascist," Truman continues. "I think most superheroes are fascists in tight-fitting clothes, except they don't realize it. One of the series' psychological aspects is that Leo will finally realize that he was trying to propagate this ultimate righteousness on people. His black-and-white view of the world might not fit in with the future—although he has gone up against a great many black-and-white menaces."

Showing his roots, the Prowler uses an old pulp argument to dissuade evil-doers from attempting any further heinous acts.

When Truman calls the Prowler's opponents black-and-white, it has a double meaning. For in a clever move, he revived Murder Legendre, the Bela Lugosi villain of *White Zombie*, a 1932 cult B movie now in public domain. A master of zombies, Legendre fought the 1980s Prowler in Eclipse's first four-issue *Prowler* mini-series, and in the back-up stories of the Prowler's 1930s adventures in the *Revenge of the Prowler* mini-series.

Like Scout, which Truman draws as well as writes for Eclipse, *The Prowler* is not an ongoing series, but an occasional one. There have been two Prowler mini-series so far, a one-shot *Airboy Meets the Prowler* book and other limited appearances including the back-up story in the first issue of *Total Eclipse*. The Prowler is a product of Truman's 4Winds studio. Truman writes the modern Prowler incarnation which John K. Snyder III (*Fashion in Action Special*) draws in a moody and disturbing style. The back-up Prowler stories are the work of writer Mike Price and artist Graham Nolan, with Truman pitching in as needed.

Truman says that his original plan was for the Prowler to be an ongoing series, but sales haven't supported that aim.

"We've got nothing but enthusiastic critical response on *Prowler*," he says. "But the distributors don't seem to be

Leo may yearn for a return to the simpler days of yore, but Truman notes that "his black-and-white view of the world might not fit in with the future."

ordering it in the quantities that we *need* to keep the book on a regular schedule. We're very proud of the work, but it's disheartening that we see it called a hit in 'zines. We don't see those numbers."

When the Prowler concept first came to Truman, he immediately phoned Snyder and spilled out his vision of a Svengali-like pulp hero taking over the life of his young protege. Snyder was as taken with the story potential of the dark side of the pulp hero archetype as Truman. Their collaboration is in some ways a reflection of the Leo Kragg/Scott Kida relationship.

"John's much more low key than I am," Truman points out. "I'm thought of as kind of intense in the way that I approach a story. John's much more mellow. In fact, he has many of Scott's attitudes about things. When I first thought of the series, I thought, 'Now, how would John react to this situation? Would John say it was stupid?' So, I think of what John would say and I put those words into Scott's mouth."

Does that make Tim Truman the Leo Kragg of the team?

"Yeah," Truman laughs. "I'm a bit more reactionary. But I wouldn't go out there with a .45 and blow anybody away. I've definitely got some very paradoxical attitudes about a number of things. I'm liberal, but I believe in capital punishment. I'm a non-militarist, but I draw guns."

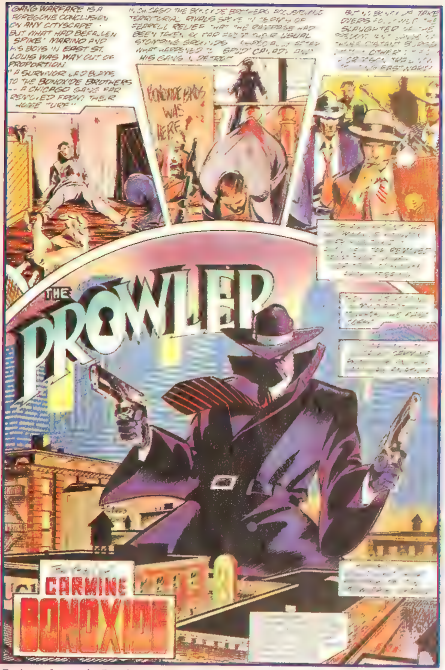
Although the Prowler grew out of Tim Truman's love of the popular culture heritage of the 1930s and 1940s—especially pulp magazines, B movies and blues music—he hasn't limited his plots to retro-Depression recyclings. In the recent *Revenge of the Prowler* mini-series, Leo and Scott, teaming up with another pair of public domain serial heroes, the Fighting Devil Dogs, go after a child pornography ring. After the horror of Murder Legendre and his zombies, a true-to-life criminal ring might have seemed relatively tame. Hardly. And the encounter has a profound effect on Kida.

"The second adventure hits closer to home," Truman says. "Scott gets to see something truly evil in the way these kids are being exploited. They don't have the opportunity to make their own choices about how their bodies are being used. Scott sees these kids being abused and being made to do things beyond their will, and he starts seeing the Prowler's side of things—that there is evil out there. Maybe Leo's right, he thinks. Maybe we should get involved in this sort of thing. He starts siding a little more with Leo but is still very leery of Leo's tactics in handling these situations. Leo consciously and unconsciously manipulates Scott toward that direction."

As Scott's training progresses, the ongoing role Leo will play becomes problematical. What happens when Scott's training ends?

"It's something that people speculate on a lot," Truman says. "But I don't see anything happening to Leo. In what will be the third four-issue mini-series, Leo ends up having a heart attack that puts him in the hospital and he sends Scott out on a mission to find a Chinaman who will be our Wu Fang, Fu Manchu or Yellow Claw, who has the elixir vitae. The story's psychological aspect is that Scott will be confronted dead-on with the question of whether he wants to carry on in Leo's footsteps. He wants to help Leo as a

Is Scott just Leo's protege or an unwitting pawn in the Prowler's plans? "Leo consciously and unconsciously manipulates Scott," notes Truman.



Art: By & Copyright 1988 Graham Nolan/Colors: Dan Gidley

Daring to betray the Prowler's trust, Mike Price and Graham Nolan reveal the secrets of the mystery man's early adventures in each issue's back-up.

friend, but he doesn't know if he wants to stay involved as the new Prowler. He's doing this mission to keep Leo alive."

During this mini-series, Scott will be forced to team up with several of Kragg's old comrades, including the Fighting Devil Dog(s) and Captain Eagle, an aviator hero Truman created, who previously appeared in several Skywolf back-up stories in *Airboy*.

"Most of them have turned into something that's quite a bit of a come-down from the glory that they formerly were basking in," Truman adds. "They end up going to this place called Nazi Island. The name of that series will be *The Prowler on Nazi Island*."

Before that mini-series begins Eclipse will release a Prowler one shot designed to wrap up the period version of the Prowler's second encounter with Murder Legendre, which began in the *Revenge of the Prowler* as a back-up feature.

"We wanted to make sure that the things Mike Price was doing in the back-up would come to a conclusion," Truman explains. "Mike's a film critic. He co-wrote a book that Eclipse distributed called *Forgotten Horrors*. That's one of the reasons he was so valuable to the Prowler project. He has many influences to draw on because one of our main purposes in

Artist John K. Snyder III "has many of Scott's attitudes about things," Truman says. "I think of what John would say and put those words into Scott's mouth."

the *Prowler* was to take all the sort of two-dimensional 1930s and '40s characters and plot material and flesh them out a bit. If a person was really doing this, what would their psychology be? Mike has been able to do that with some of the old movies he knows about.

"The *White Zombie* storyline is really neat," Truman remarks. "It's real pulp because he has added the Prowler into that movie. Chandu the Magician is in it, too. It's the Lugosi version of Chandu. We say that he and Murder Legendre are twin brothers!"

Tentatively titled *Guns of the Prowler*, the one-shot will be shot in tones to simulate the look and feel of a grainy old black and white film. And the story will segue into a quasi-adaptation of another half-forgotten film, guest-starring the Prowler.

"We wanted to do another favorite movie of ours, *The Emperor Jones*," Truman reveals, "so we're making that up as a sequel to *White Zombie*. Leo goes from the *White Zombie* island to the *Emperor Jones* island. He's just a marvelous character to run up against, this black emperor on an island. That movie's in public domain, too, so we can

(continued on page 65)

Art: By & Copyright 1988 John K. Snyder III/Colors: Dan Gidley

The Ultimate Kiss-Off

By JAMI BERNARD

To talk to Howard Chaykin is to get the feeling that he has waited all his life to plant his *Black Kiss* on the puckered-up faces of fans and foes alike. *Black Kiss*, which he calls an "erotic thriller," is the most controversial of this controversial writer/artist's work to date, and Chaykin is lapping it up.

"It's an erotic, fairly nasty, hard-boiled story about people who are caught up in circumstances a bit beyond their control," says Chaykin, speaking from his home in L.A. But the telephone can't mask the sound of a Cheshire-cat grin.

Whether it's erotic or pornographic is

It's adults only for sex, scandal, murder and the pursuit of happiness—as Howard Chaykin delivers a big "Black Kiss."

debatable, but Chaykin is right—it *is* fairly nasty. It's about blackmail, prostitutes, murder and psychosexual situations. From the "kiss" of the title on down, *Black Kiss* is a torrent of oralness: talking, telephone answering machines with dirty messages. There's no love to speak of—Chaykin is not much on tender moments between consenting adults—but there's sex, sex, sex.

Except, of course, for those four panels on page 7 of Chapter Two. The actress Bev is showing a stranger just how thankful she is for the lift he has given her on the deserted highway late one night. Because publisher Vortex Comics is based in porn-conscious Toronto, Chaykin was asked by lawyers to make Bev a little less grateful on page 7, or at least to leave the extent of her gratitude to the readers' imaginations. Otherwise, Bev may get a lift, but she won't get past customs. Chaykin complied.

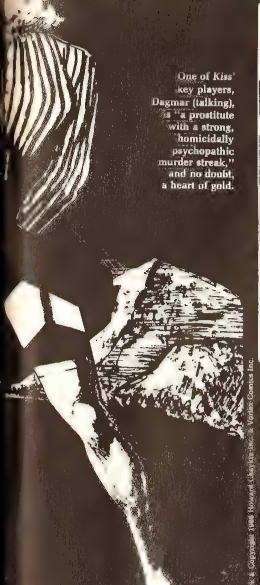
"I changed it graciously," he says. "Perhaps I pushed the envelope a little farther than I should have. What I'm doing here is a nasty comic book, and I don't mind the occasional change in the name of good taste. Picasso said the enemy of creativity is good taste, but then, who the [bleep] is Howard Chaykin, thinking he's working in good taste to begin with?"

No, Chaykin didn't really say "bleep," but then "*Mmphhs shlurrp*" is one of the few lines from *Black Kiss* that's the least bit quotable in a family publication. This may be why *Penthouse Forum*, which is not a family publication, is running the first installment of this "comic noir."

At presstime, three of 12 or so chapters were finished, along with a 120-page outline. However, the covers are all you will be able to see of *Black Kiss* in your local comic-book shop since Vortex has shrink-wrapped each copy to protect the faint of heart and the tender of years. The June cover, the first installment, is a black-and-white rendering of a woman in lace bra and formal gloves. The shadow of a barred window only reveals her from the nose down.

Still, the covers are tame compared to the contents. *Black Kiss* opens with a phone machine going off. Here, with some editing, is what it says: "Hello, lover, this is Dagmar... I'd love to talk to you, but I can't come to the phone right now, because I'm showing some lucky guy just what five feet, seven inches of natural blonde heat can do to a man... I'm a long-legged, blue-eyed,

ELLEN... LONG TIME NO SEE.
SKRRR



One of Kiss' key players, Dagmar (talking), is "a prostitute with a strong, homicidally psychopathic murder streak," and no doubt, a heart of gold.

HEY, SIS!
I SCHO
I TOLD YOU I'D HANDLE IT—SO TAKE IT
—AND WHAT'S WRONG WITH PHONE MESSAGES? THEY KEEP COMING IN—
YOU SOUND JUST AWFUL! WOULD YOU RELAX—
HUH?
THE PACKAGE ARRIVED AT LAX THIS MORNING! CONFETTI FROM ROME!
—AND YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHO PICKED IT UP AT THE TERMINAL.
GASHER THIN YOU THINK? (MURTHUR—CAN YOU DIG IT—?)
DO I LOOK LIKE I'M GOING TO WORRY, SEXY?
HONEY-THIS IS A PARTY WITHOUT CAKE!
AND I'M DOING THIS ANOTHER RIGHT NOW!
CINDI, DRINKS—YOU REMEMBER CUTE LITTLE DOLL WITH THEY V.D.'S A LITTLE MIGHTY LATE CLAUDE—
—THAT'S RIGHT—SHE'S JOINT HIS TYPE—
RIGHT—THE WALKMAN.

upon in that larger sense. "I don't know how I would behave, I can't imagine," he confesses. "For all I know, I would turn tail and run."

From physical abuse, maybe, but not from controversy. A sexual interlude in the first volume of his *Blackhawk* caused DC Comics to take the unorthodox step of making the issue returnable, and allowing retailers to cut back orders on future volumes. Then, there was his updated *Shadow*, written in the tradition of crime novelists Jim Thompson and Elmore Leonard, in which Chaykin quickly killed off most of the Shadow's old cronies. His libidinous plexus ranger Reuben Flagg, in the popular *American Flagg!* series (CSQ #2), had been the star of a near-porn TV adventure series called *Mark Thrust*. The second *Time*[2] ended with a police inspector involved with a sex-crazed squad car. Chaykin says he has seen about 450 porn flicks in his time, or maybe just lately.

So, is *Black Kiss* sexist? "No," he says, puzzled. "I'm Howard Chaykin, male, not Howard Chaykin, a member of a unisex society. I can see things from my point-of-view, and I can only abstractly identify with another point-of-view. I'm not Phil Donahue or Alan Alda. I believe in the existence of two sexes. I'm not sure I could write erotic material that could arouse a woman, but I can produce material that can arouse me. I have a reasonably well-developed imagination."

Don Thompson, co-editor of *Comics Buyers Guide*, chooses his words carefully. "Chaykin has a following, but not everything he does is suited for everybody. *Time*[2] and *American Flagg!* were explicit at times, but you had to read them to get it. It wouldn't corrupt the wee ones."

Chaykin's publisher, Bill Marks, says Vortex was interested in *Black Kiss* because "we're known for taking a chance with the avant-garde. We're known for a slick, eclectic mix of material. If we felt there would be no interference [from customs], we would publish however Howard writes and draws it." But each installment has to run the gauntlet of Vortex lawyers, just in case.

"He's not the first to do a comic like this, but it's probably the most controversial comic done by a known quantity."

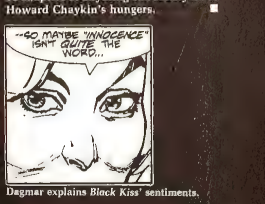
And the clear, sealed "poly-bag" that will coat each copy of *Black Kiss* "entices people, actually," says Marks.

Chaykin, meanwhile, wants out of the comic-book industry and into screenwriting, where the money is. "I've done 18 years of work in this business," he says. "I still like the process, but I'm not really interested in what most of the audience wants as content. I know that sounds whiny, but that's too bad."

When he was a kid, fat and pimply and "smacked by everybody in my house," his father having deserted the family by the time Chaykin was nine, his ultimate goal in life was "drawing Superman or Batman, later Spider-Man. But it wasn't hip to do that kind of stuff when I entered the business."

Now, after two marriages, no longer speaking to his mother or two younger brothers, he says his goal "would be defined by material return. I'm sitting at my desk in my office looking at a reservoir and hills, the windows surrounded by ivy and purple flowers; my pool will be finished in about a week. My feeling is that the pinnacle of success would be to not have to work. I could relax more, do more traveling, work out three-four days a week. I was at a cocktail party and saw all these guys with tits; they draw superheroes and look like potatoes."

But first, he'll have to finish up *Black Kiss*, and it seems doubtful that a mere 12 chapters of anything can satisfy all of Howard Chaykin's hungers. ■



Dagmar explains *Black Kiss*' sentiments.

Spider-Man

(continued from page 49)

more on the human level, we decided to create an antagonist who would exemplify that approach. I don't want to give too much away, but I can tell you that he's a scientist who develops superhuman powers in much the same way that Peter develops his. It's kind of a *Taxi Driver* version of *Spider-Man* because his nemesis is a lonely, embittered man in the vein of Travis Bickle, the kind of person that Peter Parker might have become had he not gotten his priorities straight."

Because it's a movie that emphasizes the character's emotional makeup, Pyun thinks that audiences know better than to expect a film weighed down with special effects. "It's a special effects film only in the sense that every time Spider-Man moves, it's a special effect. But it's not a special effects film in the conventional sense. If we do our job well, you won't pay particular attention to them; that's how much they flow into the story."

Other important questions dealt with in story conferences were related to Spider-Man's web-shooting mechanism and how his "flying" sequences would be executed. "Certainly, we've paid a good deal of attention to Spider-Man's powers," Pyun says. "But his powers are much more subtle than Superman's, so it takes much more work to make him look real. You can use tricks—rotoscoping, reverse photography, and so on—but it works better in the context of reality.

"What does the webbing look like?" Pyun asks rhetorically. "How do you shoot something that's so fine? In the comics, you get all these great poses as he swings; how do you translate that so the actor is not struggling to hold onto a line? How do you do away with harnesses?

"Any web-shooting mechanism, no matter how small, shows under a costume. That's why we've had Joey [*Terminator*] DiGeatano working on the web-shooting device for nearly four months and Fantasy II laboring the same amount of time over the flying stuff. We should have prototypes in about a month."

The flying will not be accomplished via wires or rear projection, says Albert Pyun. "We plan to use an old process in a new way. To paraphrase *Superman*, you'll really believe that a spider can fly."

Rabbit

(continued from page 37)

who were probably going to work on that sequence." Director Zemeckis would describe what he envisioned in the scene, and supervise detailed storyboards which Williams drew for the animators. "I would do the drawings in front of them, and sometimes they would make notes themselves, so they were very clear on what Bob wanted," Williams says. "He has actually done an enormous amount of directing of the animation. He knows what he wants in the movie, and I said to Bob right at the beginning, 'I will be your pencil.' And I *was*, literally, his pencil. I said, 'What do you want?'

"The guys would animate it, and then we would test it; maybe I would do some drawings *before* they animated it, maybe I would do a bunch of drawings after; or I would do nothing. Andreas Deja, with every scene he did, I just said, 'Great.' Most people were like that, they were right on the nose.

"I don't have a set way of working, and since this is such an odd project, that's probably to everybody's advantage. I would just look for the hole where there's trouble and work in there. I animated an awful lot of the front bit of the picture, but I didn't really animate much at all of the middle. I did a great deal of correcting—somebody's not talking right, or the eyes aren't right, or just working with the animators to get more weight and more authority into the thing. Bob would then usually worry about the performance."

The most difficult problem, Williams says, wasn't any particular special effects or specific sequences, but "just keeping continuity, so you don't have so many different-looking rabbits. You can't help drawing yourself in some way; there's Nick Ranieri, who is an Italian-Canadian, and we kept kidding him, I kept saying, 'Here's another nice tall, thin Italian-Canadian rabbit,' you know, and somebody else who's short and fat will draw a little cuddly rabbit," Williams laughs. "It's really difficult to try and get everybody into the same mold. There are many rabbits, but you would never know. Zemeckis says, 'I don't see what you're worried about, they're all the same rabbit,' but *we* would all see it."

After Williams was satisfied with the drawings, tests shot on video were dispatched to Zemeckis, who was usually back in the US. "We started videoing stuff and sending it over every *day* in the end. We had very few changes. Bob's *very* clear, and I'm kind of clear," Williams notes.

Animating such diverse classic cartoon characters as Mickey Mouse, Betty Boop, Daffy Duck, Yosemite Sam, Droopy, Bugs Bunny and Donald Duck was "easy—I mean fun," Williams says. However, this kind of fun did have a saturation point. "We got so we couldn't watch any more, I mean, I can't see Bugs Bunny again, it's going to take years." Why? "[I've] seen *too* much," Williams laughs.

As an advisor to the production, Chuck Jones, creator of Wile E. Coyote and "Duck Dodgers in the 24½th Century," worked briefly on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* "Chuck came in quite a bit at the very beginning," Williams says. "I think he came in three times, and we did a lot of drawings of Daffy Duck. We were trying to get the Road Runner and the Coyote into the movie, we never—well, he made it into the end scene, but it was cheating the period a bit, because that's early '50s and the picture is 1947.

"But we didn't see Chuck for the rest of the picture. Once the thing got going here, it was like a train leaving; there just wasn't any time because the train went so damn fast. At the beginning of that first year, Bob kept saying, 'It's going to go, Dick,' and I said, 'Are you guys *really* going to make this movie?' Because I didn't believe it, it seemed to be such an elaborate thing. I said, 'Are you sure this is going to happen?' Then said, 'It's going to happen, the train is going to go.'

"Once that test was done, the train left the station, and you just had to run. *Wham*! We were off. It was tough. They had to get all the systems working, and nobody had done anything like it. In fact, *one* of the reasons it may be so good is because the guys who weren't animators were all promoted up to do it, and they didn't have so many set ideas. I would say just about everybody in the place was promoted a jump above their present capacity, and they had this great opportunity, so it got a whole life of its own.

"I'm the oldest, and I was horrified. Roy [Naisbitt, a Williams collaborator for about 20 years] is older than me, and I'm 55. He must be about 58, [but otherwise] I'm by far the oldest guy on this picture. Don Hahn is what, 25 years younger than *me*? Zemeckis is 37. Andreas is 32. I don't think *any* of the animators were over 32. So, it's a very young crew. The average age is about 26. It has some energy.

"I was worn out before the picture started, and I said to Zemeckis, 'I'm real worried because I've been working awfully hard for 10 years.' He'd just had a year-and-a-half off, he took his money from *Back to the Future* and went around the world with his wife; they had a kid. He was as fit as a fiddle, he came in ready to go, and I said, 'Gee, I'm worn out before I even start; you guys are all 35, having your first child, and I'm going to run around the track with *you*?' And he said, 'Oh, just *relax* into the picture.' And then they were surprised. I've gotten *better* through the picture. I've sort of come back to life."

Next issue: Richard Williams discusses life after *Roger Rabbit*, almost half a lifetime's work on *The Thief and the Cobbler*, and his views on what is best in animation. ■

Ignore the silver lining. Scott McCloud promises dark times in superheroic social allegory. But why?

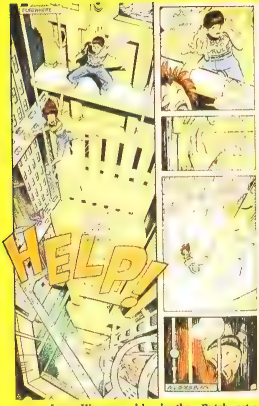
By WILL MURRAY

As a comics fan, *Zot!*'s Scott McCloud was a late bloomer. "I didn't read any superhero comics until I was 14," he admits. "Before that, I wouldn't touch a comic book. I *hated* comic books. I was much too *old* for comics before that. I was into chess, and before that, I was into science fiction. My main interest in science fiction was when it felt real and my main objection to comic books was that they weren't good science fiction. Had I read something like *Zot!* when I was 14, I might not have liked it because it wouldn't have fit my idea of what SF was," McCloud adds ruefully.

McCloud experienced a near-religious conversion when fellow junior high school student Kurt (*Liberty Project*) Busiek showed him what he was missing. McCloud, now 27, admits his late discovery of comics changed his life. He decided that comics was where he wanted to be. After college, he got a job in

And you can call Zot's creator Scott McCloud.

Photo: Courtesy Scott McCloud



Colors: Tom Zjicka

Jenny Weaver and her brother, Butch, get a taste of Zot's optimistic alternate Earth circa 1965.

the DC Comics production department and shortly thereafter sold his first creation, the acclaimed *Zot!* to Eclipse Comics. McCloud jokes that his swift rise from student to writer/artist, and his lack of a working background, are perfect qualifications for chronicling the story of two fantasy worlds.

"I moved office furniture for one month," he chuckles. "Other than that, I've spent *no* time in the real world."

Many comics fans shy away from *Zot!* for precisely the same reason McCloud originally avoided comics. They mistake its cartoony style and tongue-in-cheek atmosphere for a lack of substance. It doesn't help that the title character, Zachary T. Paleozogt—Zot to his friends—resembles nothing so much as Jonny Quest dressed in a variation of Captain Marvel's costume. Although Zot is a superhero, McCloud resists categorizing *Zot!* as a superhero comic.

"I view it as—are you ready for this?—social allegory," McCloud reveals. "That sounds dumb, so I keep that to myself. But that's really what it is. It's not a superhero book, because a superhero book at its most pure is about power, about tactics, and who's fighting who and how. And even though almost every issue of *Zot!* is going to have somebody fighting someone else—usually Zot fighting a villain—what it's really about is a clash of ideas. What you're seeing is ideas played out on a physical stage."

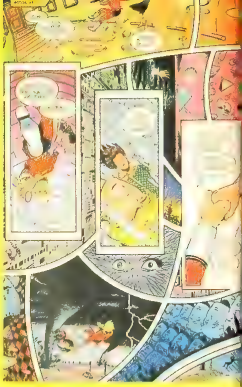
The conceit behind *Zot!* is deceptively simplistic. An Earth girl, Jenny Weaver, and her brother stumble upon Zot one day. Zot is a quintessential 1940s superhero. He comes from an alternate Earth where reality is a kind of idealized 1930s prediction of the future. The trio's adventures on both Earths and the clash of divergent realities drive *Zot!*.

The impetus to create Zot came from Scott McCloud's discovery of the original Dick Calkins *Buck Rogers* comic strip with its clunky spaceships and hopeless faith in the limitless promise of science.

"The Calkins *Buck Rogers* didn't really thrill me," McCloud admits, "but I managed to find some spark of something in them that really fascinated me. I knew that if I had been a kid at the time when they were coming out, I would have really loved them. And I tried to capture what that was and expand upon it."

At that time, McCloud was busily creating many different concepts, looking to break into the field as a writer/artist. But it was the retro-future vision inspired by *Buck Rogers* that seized his imagination and wouldn't let go.

"For a while, Zot was going to be a robot," McCloud says of his original idea. "Other than that, he has always been a little blonde kid because that was the picture of the young innocent hero from the old days. I went through a million different names, Dick Zowie, Comet Calloway—all sorts of goofy, stupid names. I love the shorter names. Kurt Busiek actually suggested Zot. I loved it right away. It was so instant and it had *no* meaning, apart from the anteater in B.C."



Once he had his lead character, McCloud recalls the core of the *Zot!* cast—which includes Jenny, Butch, Zot's Uncle Max, and his robot servant, Peabody—came in a rush of inspiration.

"Jenny and Butch came very early," he observes. "The second character I came up with was Dr. Bellows, because he seemed like the natural villain—that old clanking, black-smoke Industrial Revolution villain. He was mostly inspired by Jack Lemmon's character, Professor Fate, in *The Great Race*. Of course, Jack Lemmon's character was already a cliche

Early conception of 9-Jack-9.

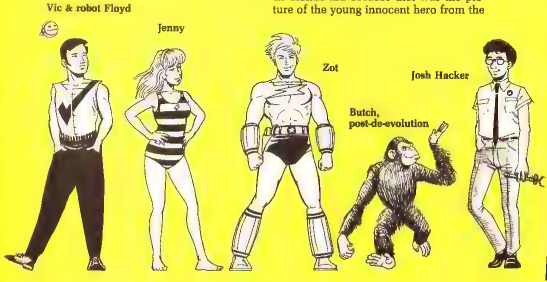
Vic & robot Floyd

Jenny

Zot

Josh Hacker

Butch, post-de-evolution



"A nice all-purpose example of imagination in Zot!" notes McCloud.

when that movie was made, so he's public domain so to speak.

"My favorite books have always had great villains," McCloud says. "When I got into comics, I wanted to come up with a rogue's gallery that is every bit as good as Daredevil's, Spider-Man's, Batman's or even Dick Tracy's. And I knew that in order to come up with a good set of villains, I had to come up with more than just a great set of names or superpowers. They had to *mean* something, too. And that's what I built them around. Each one of them has a little secret meaning for me. And I think people who read the book can understand much of what the villains mean to them from what they represent. Each one is a different type. There's Dekko, the Madman . . . Zybox, the Monster . . . Bellows, the Villain with a capital 'V.' There's the Blotch, the Crook. He's coming up. And there's 9-Jack-9, the Assassin."

Of all of Zot's villains, 9-Jack-9, whose eyeglass-like eyes and straw hat make him resemble an evil Elton John—though McCloud says he created Jack before John began dressing that way—is paramount.

"The most classic and most important villain is 9-Jack-9," he affirms, "because he's the hero's opposite. He's everything that Zot isn't. Zot represents life. He's a very life-affirming character. Jack is death itself. Jack could be my Dr. Doom in the sense that if anyone's going to kill the hero, it's going to be him."

But it's Dekko, the cyborg with the Chrysler Building head, who seems to be the villain loyal readers love most to hate.

"Dekko is my joker," McCloud says. "Dekko is the character who gets most under the readers' skin. I never sit down to try to create a villain. I never know when one's going to come up to me and bang me on the head. Dekko was a strange one. He came in bits and pieces. The best villains always come out of the subconscious. That's the Joker's strength. He's straight out of the subconscious mind. For the last 50 years, kids have been having nightmares about the Joker. If I can inspire a nightmare or two with Dekko," McCloud adds mischievously, "I'll *definitely* be on the right track."

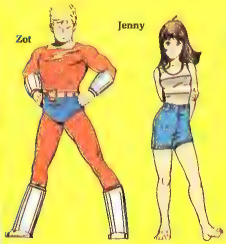
Although McCloud decided against involving Zot in Eclipse's recent multi-part crossover series, *Total Eclipse* (CSQ #3), he hasn't closed the door to later Eclipse crossovers, and he hints that a *Zot!/Liberty Project* crossover is a reasonable bet. And for the first time, he has teamed up with another artist on the regular book, *Hero Sandwich*'s Chuck Austen, for the two-part "Getting to 99" story in *Zot!* #19 and #20, which were simultaneously released in June.

Scripted especially for Austen to give McCloud breathing room for his recent wedding, the double issue is a radical departure for McCloud, who says, "My instinct is that if one can write and draw your own book, you really *should* because no artist is going to capture your stories as well as you."

"After 'Getting to 99,'" McCloud reveals, "Zot will battle the master criminal called the Blotch. He looks like a 1930s gangster, complete with the pin-striped zoot suit, machine gun in violin case, and smoking cigar. His head is a continuous ongoing purple explosion. Right smack in the middle of it is a face. His motives are very ordinary. He is greedy. He is a criminal but a very special kind of criminal—he's *legitimate*. He's a businessman from a planet of absolutely unrestrained capitalism, where businesses are like countries and they're always at war.

All Zot Art: By & Courtesy Scott McCloud

For an innocent hero who looks like Jonny Quest, Zot sure gets into a pack of trouble.



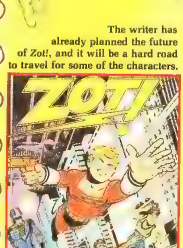
All Zot Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1984, 1985 Silver Linings

Color Assist: Phil DeWalt

The Dick Calkins *Buck Rogers* helped inspire this early sketch of Zot.

If Dekko can cause nightmares among readers, McCloud knows he has created a good villain.

The writer has already planned the future of *Zot!*, and it will be a hard road to travel for some of the characters.



"In this two-part story," McCloud goes on, "the focus is the searing question: Will Zot sell out? Zot is asked to endorse a product called Bingo Pop, which as it turns out is owned by the very company that the Blotch serves as president. So, can Zot fight the Blotch and still uphold his contract not to say or do anything that would cause his company shame? Major conflict of interest here."

This story will continue to explore Zot's changing relationship with Jenny—who McCloud says is showing signs of replacing Zot as the readers' favorite character.

"Jenny is actually very upset with Zot for doing the commercials in the first place, and Zot must wrestle with his conscience. Also, Jenny is slowly being drawn toward a possible rival for Zot named Woody."

First introduced in *Zot!* #11 as a nerdy school kid, Woody recently returned in issue #17, taller, more mature and, to Jenny, more attractive. His character will become pivotal in future issues.

"Zot and Jenny's romance so far has been very simple and very innocent," McCloud says. "With #17, things got quite a bit more complicated. We began to see that that innocent relationship was becoming unsatisfying for Jenny. Suddenly, Jenny has discovered somebody who thinks a lot like she does and who she really has much more in common with than she does with Zot. And she's beginning to question her relationship to Zot. Zot is *completely* oblivious to this—*so far*. All I can guarantee is that things won't go as the reader expects.

"After Zot's ultimate nemesis, 9-Jack-9 returns in #23 and #24," McCloud continues, "I plan to do some down-to-earth stories taking place on our Earth, and centering on Jenny's life and school days as Zot is marooned here for several issues. And within the next eight or so issues, we're going to be learning much more about Zot's world and some of the things we're going to be learning may be very shocking."

While speculating on the course of future plotlines, Scott McCloud drops an unexpected bombshell.

"The *last* issue of *Zot!* is halfway plotted," he says. "I don't know how many issues in the future it's going to be, but I know where the story is going. It has a long way to go, but the seeds of the whole story are mostly planted. There's no doubt in my mind that we haven't seen half of it yet. Probably no more than a quarter. But when I'm done with *Zot!*, I'll be *done*."

Pressed for more details, McCloud offers this.

"I know that every comic-book writer says there'll be lots of surprises, but I feel confident that nobody could *possibly* guess what I have in store for this character. If you know what *Zot!* is about, then you can begin to write the ending yourself. Because if a reader already understands what I've been saying so far, then he can begin to understand what still needs to be said.

"By the time we get there, we will have decided the fates of every major character in the book one way or other," Scott McCloud concludes. "And all those fates will be different. Every single one of them will arrive at a different point. There are 10 or 12 main characters. Not *all* of them will survive." ■

Zot Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1987, 1988 Scott McCloud

Prowler

(continued from page 56)

play with it whatever way we want."

Beyond that, the future of the Prowler is up in the air. Truman has plans for a Prowler radio show re-creation, much in the manner of the flexidisc bound into *Revenge of the Prowler* #2, but on audio cassette, complete with spurious photos and biographies of the actors who starred in the Prowler radio show that never was.

In addition, Truman, who is a blues musician with his own band, the Dixie Pistols, hopes to combine his musical interests with a special Prowler project.

"Mike and I would love to do a Prowler graphic novel and mix it with a music project we've been wanting to do," he says. "Mike and I have these little bits of period music we've been sending to each other. We're both real blues and early jazz fans, so we wanted to do a Prowler story that would involve New Orleans jazz. And there are many real fact-based horror stories that come from the New Orleans, late '20s-early '30s era. There was an ax murderer who was murdering Italian people and he said that he would stop murdering Italians whenever jazz was played in every club in New Orleans. There's also a story about a jazz legend—one of the guys who really invented the music—named Buddy Bolden. There have never been any photographs of the guy. He went crazy and spent his last days in an institution. We're trying to mix this Buddy Bolden legend in with the ax murderer scenario, and we've come up with a really strange *film noir* murder story. We want to have music of the era in this graphic album project, actually put together authentic sounding music and have it as part of the package. We want the music to enhance the storyline. Eclipse is interested in it because [Eclipse editor] Cat Yronwode is a big jazz fan of that particular era."

Is the Prowler destined to exist only in limited series and one-shots?

"I think it's going to end up that way," Tim Truman admits. "I'm not really opposed to that because one of the things that I think is wrong with American comics is that the creators must turn out 26 to 32 pages on a monthly basis. After a while, you're really at your wit's end about what to do with the character. Pretty soon, you run into a stone wall as far as deadlines go. Or you have to bash out a story. You're really not able to spend the time that would push that story a notch upward and take it beyond—I hate to say pulp, since I'm so fond of pulp—but beyond some sort of two-dimensional bash-'em-up. With *Prowler*, we want to do something different. We have fun with it. It's a good adventure story and all that, but in order to make a *really* good adventure story, you have to delve into the characterization and motivations of these characters." ■

Odyssey

(continued from page 16)

"Darkseid changed radically from the way he was done beforehand to *The Hunger Dogs*. It seemed like he was no longer in charge [of Apokolips]; the bureaucracy was in charge. Darkseid had become a much more mellow character.

"*The Hunger Dogs* wasn't the New Gods we started off with. Kirby obviously wanted to end the series. It just didn't seem like the same characters."

Starlin admits that writing cosmic stories again is quite a departure from his work on *Batman*. "It's weird writing flowery dialogue instead of gritty street talk," he notes.

He first won his fame as an artist, but these days, is concentrating more on writing. However, Starlin hasn't abandoned art totally. He is currently pencilling *Gilgamesh II*, a science-fiction/humor adaptation of the classic poem. Starlin is also writing, inking and coloring it, "which means it may not be out for years!"

No release date has been set. "I'm not going to let them put it in release until I've got at least three of them done. So far, I'm ¾ of the way through [drawing] the first one, and it only took me *nine* months to get this far," he laughs. "This may take longer than *The Killing Joke* to get published!"

One project Starlin did complete recently is his first novel, *Among Madmen*, written in collaboration with his wife, Daina Graziunas. Starlin describes the book as "horrific fantasy." It's under consideration by several different publishers.

For now, Starlin is putting his energy into *Cosmic Odyssey*, as he once again blasts off for star-spanning excitement. However, don't expect any cosmic truths to unfold, or to learn any major revelations about the universe, DC or otherwise.

Jim Starlin has only one goal: "Nothing but entertainment." ■

Disney

(continued from page 41)

human. Ursala offers to make a potion that will turn her into a human for three days; but before sunset on the third day, the prince must fall in love with her and bestow the kiss of true love, and then she will be a human forever. If not, she turns back into a mermaid, and will belong to Ursala forever.

"Her choice is complicated by the fact that if she does become human, she can never return to the sea. She'll never see her father again," Clements says.

Among the voices cast in roles for *The Little Mermaid* are: Rene Auberjonois, Jodi Benson, Pat Carroll, Todd Carroll, Jason Marin, Kenneth Mars and Andrew Stevens.

Interestingly, the Disney Studios have largely refrained from falling into two traps classically associated with animated films. First, they try to avoid entirely relying on star voices to carry a story; and, secondly, the stories don't talk down to children. It is this lack of condescension when it comes to storytelling that has kept so many of the Disney stories alive for both children and adults for generations.

Over the past four years, since Roy Disney asked Michael Eisner and Frank Wells to step in and help get the studio back on its feet, the Disney animation department has grown from about 170 employees to a peak of 650. Nearing completion at the new Disney/MGM Studios in Florida is a fully operational, second animation facility, which will be staffed by more than 80 artists, who will work primarily on new featurettes starring Mickey Mouse and all the standard Disney characters. "This represents the first time since 1940 that we've begun production on a Mickey featurette," Katzenberg says.

And, in fact, the entire thrust of this new administration's plans seem to be taking the studio right back to where Walt Disney left off in the early 1940s before his production plans were interrupted by World War II: the peak of the Golden Age of Animation. After the groundbreaking success of *Snow White* in 1937, the studio embarked upon an ambitious schedule which saw the release of *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia* in 1940, *The Reluctant Dragon* and *Dumbo* in 1941, and *Bambi* (now in re-release) in 1942. Cut off from his lucrative foreign markets early in the war and the necessity of turning the studio over to war production films and shorts, brought feature animation to a near standstill. After the war and by the 1950s, the Disney Studios were lucky to release a feature once every two years. Now, under the control of Chief Executive Officer Michael Eisner and his staff, the studio seems committed to animation as both an art form and a money-making entertainment medium. ■

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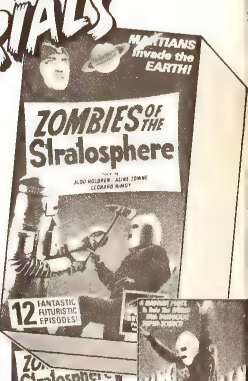

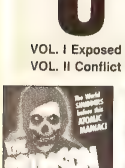

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De Matteis

(continued from page 52)

light, then share the light. The ultimate story is to look into the depths of hell, and at the darkest point in hell, to look up and see God's face. I don't want to drag people down; I want to lift people up."

That concern will see DeMatteis penning a one-issue Spider-Man tale sometime next year which will further explore Kraven's death.

Although the Kraven saga made DeMatteis take a hard look at his own work, he says he never really allowed his creative energies to flow until he first did *Moonshadow*, followed by *Greenberg, the Vampire* and *Blood*, explaining that by the time he wrote *Blood*, he had learned to "write with his unconscious" and let the story come from his heart.

"I can't keep my life out of anything I do," he reveals. "I would pick up the most throw-away superhero character and think, 'I can't believe I exposed myself, my innermost feelings, in the pages of *Forever People*.' "

Despite his love for the medium, he still wants to be known for more than his comics material.

"Most of us in comics are really ambivalent about the medium for the reasons we're talking about. God, it's a lot of fun, and, on sublevels, there's a great amount of creative freedom. But I've always felt like a writer doing comic books, not a comic-book writer. There are a great many other things I hope and intend to do."

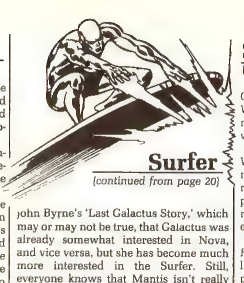
One comic-related project is *Brooklyn Dreams*, the story of a young boy growing up in Brooklyn in the early '70s, which DeMatteis will be writing for DC's Piranha Press. Mark Badger, *Martian Manhunter* artist, is slated to illustrate it. DeMatteis refers to *Brooklyn Dreams* as his "last big bang in comics."

In the future for DeMatteis, a songwriter and musician as well as author, is a children's comic tentatively titled *The Stardust Kid*, with art by Sherry Van Valkenberg, the wife of *Blood*'s Kent Williams. There's possibly more television work, as he has already seen a short story turn into an episode of *The Twilight Zone* and scripted an animated segment for *The Real Ghostbusters*. Perhaps he'll even see his completed screenplay of *Greenberg* make it into film production. Not to mention the three other screenplays, six novels and nine short stories he has waiting in his computer.

In short, J.M. DeMatteis has a great deal of writing ahead of him, which he's happy about, and claims this is his year to get them all finished.

"If you don't push yourself and make the time, it will *never* get done," he notes.

"One reason I write, besides the fact that it keeps me sane, is that I want to reach people and I want to touch people and I want the stories to go through their hearts the way they've gone into mine."



Surfer

(continued from page 20)

John Byrne's 'Last Galactus Story,' which may or may not be true, that Galactus was already somewhat interested in Nova, and vice versa, but she has become much more interested in the Surfer. Still, everyone knows that Mantis isn't really dead, and Mantis was the one he was most interested in—so, I'm gonna play some games," Englehart says.

"Shalla Bal is still around, too—she fell into the same morass that I was talking about before, with people being tired of the situation that involved her. Essentially, I made her Corazon Aquino: she became the leader of her society, and the responsibility precluded her going with the Surfer now. On the other hand, I don't think we've seen the last of her. Pretty soon, the Surfer's gonna have more girl friends than the beast used to... "

Of course, he will have another continuing character to contend with in the series. "It's hard to envision Galactus as a *supporting* character," Englehart explains, "but his relationship to the Surfer goes back a long way. His relationship to Nova—who is becoming involved with the Surfer—is ongoing. So, Galactus is part of the Surfer's immediate family. I don't want to overuse him, but he's as much a part of the strip as anyone."

Englehart says fan reaction so far has been excellent. "Although the Surfer is well regarded by anyone reading comics up until about 1973, I thought he would be unknown to readers today, because he hadn't made very many appearances. But apparently, when kids start to get interested in Marvel Comics, they very quickly hear about this legendary character. He became a part of Marvel mythology," which Englehart says has been gratifying to Marshall Rogers, Joe Staton and current artist Ron Lim.

Although some of the Surfer's original fans are still around, many of his current readers are being introduced to the character for the first time.

"We certainly get many letters from people who knew him before, and are happy to see him back because they've always liked him. But clearly, the majority of readers are getting to know him for the first time. The Surfer hit on all sorts of levels—sales and fan reaction have been excellent," Steve Englehart smiles.

"There haven't been any real space-faring characters around on a regular basis for quite a while. The Silver Surfer remains unique in the Marvel Universe."

Semper Fi'

(continued from page 31)

Crosses, made his name in both World Wars. They'll only have cameos, I might mention that a Whittier or a Gimbel is in a well-known marine's command.

"By the way, one of the great Korean War stories involves Puller," Palladino notes. "When the Marines were surrounded at Chosan Reservoir, he supposedly said, 'Now I have these SOBs right where I want them; they can't escape.' "

Summing up, Palladino says of *Semper Fi'*, "It won't be a traditional war book like *Sgt. Rock* or *Sgt. Fury*. War is not a pleasant thing, and you have to show people what war really is. We'll see the peacetime Marines as well. I did a couple of stories about boot camp 1960s-style, and I plan on some contemporary stories, too. One of the pieces is about the bombing in Beirut."

Working with Palladino as the artists on the series are veterans John Severin (see sidebar) and Sam Glanzman. This team of fledgling and old-timer produced several issues of *Semper Fi'* before even meeting.

"I've met John Severin only once [just a week before this interview]. I submit the scripts to Marvel, they forward them to John. The first story I submitted, I didn't know how to approach the form. I looked at a sample script and I tried to do it that way. I was very explicit in my instructions. When I spoke to John, he said, 'Great. The more explicit you are, the easier it is for me.'

"I tend to look at things visually. The finished art I've seen is spectacular, both from Severin and Sam Glanzman, who is an ex-Navy man. Sam did some of the Continental Marine stories. I figured he would be comfortable handling ships. I would like to do more shipboard stories, so the reader can see how the Marines operate aboard ships, from early times to the present.

"The Marines are the Navy's strike force," Palladino notes. "As much as Marines hate to admit it, we're a part of the Navy. We're their justification. If the Navy were to put in a landing party, it would just be sailors with some rifles. That's impractical, and the Navy saw that early on, so they patterned our Marines on the British Royal Marines.

"We call Navy people anchor-cranckers, they call us jarheads, but it's a pretty good relationship."

Is *Semper Fi'* the only Michael Palladino-scripted comic book readers will see? Not if Palladino has anything to say about it. "I would like to do other projects in comics, definitely. The stories have changed since the days when I was reading them, they're a bit more realistic. If you're a storyteller—and I like telling stories—there's a great deal you can do in comics." ■

COMICS REPORTER

Phantom Poster Courtesy Dan Scapperotti

The Phantom Walks on the Silver Screen

With all of the comics characters now being translated to the big screen these days, it seems only right that the first costumed character in comic-strip history, the Phantom, would have his turn.

The surprise is that the upcoming Phantom film will be an Australian production. A quartet of producers, including Bruce Sherlock, Peter Sjoquist, John Torv and Rodney Price, along with screenwriter Ken Shadie, are currently collaborating with strip creator/writer Lee Falk on a Phantom movie budgeted at between $15 and $20 million Australian—$4-5 million American.

"I'm very excited about it," the Phantom's 78-year-old creator says. "I wrote the story. Ken Shadie, who wrote *'Crocodile' Dundee* with Paul Hogan, is doing the screenplay based on my story. I was invited to Australia in March and gave him the story."

Asked to describe the storyline, Falk demurs.

"It will be a jungle story," he promises. "The current Phantom's first adventure will be in the film, probably a little different than in the past. It will probably be shot in Queensland and New Guinea."

Tom Tyler ruled Skull Cave as the Phantom in the '40s serial.

Art: Sy Barry

The idea of an American-born hero like the Phantom being usurped by the Aussies may seem odd at first, but there's a good reason. Despite the Phantom's incredible long-term popularity in this country, the Ghost Who Walks is even more popular overseas. Their bi-weekly *Phantom* series is the bestselling comic book in Australia and New Zealand, and the Australian Phantom Fan Club's membership currently numbers more than 4,000 people.

Add to that the enormous international success of the Australian-produced *'Crocodile' Dundee* movies and it all makes perfect sense. In fact, many of the people behind *The Phantom* worked on *'Crocodile' Dundee*. That leads to an unavoidable question: Will Paul Hogan, who once played the Phantom in an Australian TV spoof, step into the purple suit?

"No way!" Lee Falk says flatly. "He doesn't fit the part. I don't think there will be a star for this movie. If you want to get a star, you want somebody like Arnold Schwarzenegger, not Paul Hogan, but there's nothing in the budget for Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone. I don't think this movie needs a star. It needs a fine actor who is a big, powerful athletic type. He'll have to be an attractive man because you'll see a great deal of him without his mask. You do see his face. And if the picture's a hit, he'll be a star like Christopher Reeve, who was such a wonderful choice for *Superman*. He was so likable, he was perfect. Well, we need a Phantom like *that*."

Shooting isn't expected to begin until the script is approved and the cast assembled. Falk has script approval and expects to be consulted on casting choices. Although the Phantom has enjoyed great success in diverse media, this will be the first live-action Phantom film since Columbia's 1943 serial starring Tom (*The Adventures of Captain Marvel*) Tyler, which Falk recently had the chance to rewatch on videotape.

"Then, I thought it was terrible," he says of his original impression of film's first *Phantom*. "But looking back at it now, I was surprised. It was kind of fun. Tom Tyler's pretty good. It was slightly primitive, but it was amusing. It was done straight. It wasn't campy at all, and it had all the elements of the strip."

On the other hand, Falk says of Columbia's *Mandrake the Magician* serial, based on his other long-running King Features strip, "I was *embarrassed* by it. Mandrake was done very stupidly. They forgot he was a magician. It was all fistfights and car chases. They missed the whole point."

According to Falk, the modern Mandrake movie (CSQ #1) announced years ago from Goldcrest Pictures will not happen.

"Julian Temple was hired by Goldcrest to direct it," Falk reports. "I didn't like the script. A friend of Julian Temple's wrote it, actually. What he did was rewrite a script that I had written, and that evidently doomed it. There wasn't a decent script prepared, and some Hollywood people came in with Goldcrest and turned it down mainly because of script trouble."

Falk adds that other interested parties are pursuing Mandrake.

With a Phantom film in the offing and negotiations coming up with DC Comics about a continuation of their recent *Phantom* miniseries (CSQ #3), talk of a Phantom renaissance makes Lee Falk chuckle.

"I know that people talk about the Phantom making a comeback," Falk scoffs. "But the Phantom has *always* been here. He has remained for maybe 40 out of the last 52 years as the number one newspaper strip in the world—and still is, in terms of circulation."

—Will Murray

Phantom Character: Trademark & Copyright King Features Syndicate

The Comics Screen

In some way or another, these comic book/strip/pulp/radio/cartoon characters have been announced as bound for another medium: movie, TV, animation, even Broadway. The following list is by no means complete and will be continuously revised. *All* projects are live-action unless otherwise specified. Those marked by an asterisk have had a significant change since previous listing. **Attn: comics & media professionals:** Clarifications and other information to be added to this list are cheerfully invited. Send it to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016.

The Addams Family. Projected TV pilot.

The Adjuster. Comic character in development from Marvel & Columbia Pictures TV.

The Airtight Garage. Moebius' SF graphic novel. Animated full-length feature. Co-production between Montreal-based animation firm Productions Pascal Blais & Starwatcher Graphics.

The American. Dark Horse Comics hero in development as film or TV series.

American Flagg! Movie. Dick Rosetti, producer.

Andy Capp. Separate British & American TV pilots in works.

* **Annie**. Separate movie & Broadway musical sequels in development. Movie, to have been directed by Lewis Gilbert, is now in limbo *again*!

* **Antman**. New World developed a script. Unlikely.

* **Archie**. Movie. Warner Bros.

Bahar Rabor: *The Movie*, an animated project to debut in spring 1989.

* **The Batman**. Movie from Warner Bros. Script by Sam Hamm. Director: Tim Burton. Filming begins in September. Projected Saturday morning animated series didn't sell.

* **Beany & Cecil**. Returns as a Saturday morning animated series on ABC. All-new episodes from DIC.

Beany & Cecil & Dishonest John return this fall.

Blondie. Further half-hour CBS animated special planned.

* **Brenda Starr, Reporter**. Movie starring Brooke Shields & Timothy Dalton. Release delayed by rights dispute.

Bugs Bunny. *Bugs Bunny & Tweety*, hour animated series, on ABC Saturdays.

* **Bullwinkle**. Natasha & Boris Badenov are to resurface in a live-action comedy *Our Boy Badenov* starring Sally Kellerman and Dave Thomas. Script by Charles Fradin. Charles Martin-Smith, director. Filming begins soon.

* **Captain America**. Cannon Film dead (?). Broadway musical in development.

Captain Teen & Company. Rankin-Bass is developing as Saturday a.m. animated series.

Cathy. Further animated TV specials to appear on CBS.

The Chameleon. New comics character. Joint production between Marvel Productions & Ohlmeyer Communications TV.

Chip & Dale. Animated characters to star in new syndicated series for Disney.

Conan the Barbarian. Two different *Conan III* script treatments were prepared. Sequel in limbo.

Copperhead: The Legend of Mongrel. Joint Marvel & Laurel Entertainment project developed by Jim Shooter & director George Romero. Reportedly dead, though Romero would still "like" to do it.

Cracked. Superhero parody movie in development.

Crossfire. TV pilot. ABC.

Daffy Duck. "The Duxorcist" in release. Another new short, "Night of the Living Duck," follows.

Daredevil. TV and movie incarnation discussed.

Delta Tenn. TV series in development by Shannon Tweed to star herself.

DNAgents. Option lapsed on CBS-TV movie. Picked up by UA for feature.

* **Dennis the Menace**. CBS Saturday morning animated series cancelled.

Dick Tracy. Movie. Long in development with various directors & writers, now at 20th Century Fox. Still an active project.

Doc Savage. Movie project reportedly in the works.

* **Dr. Mortalis**. New Jack Kirby comics character created for Empire Entertainment movie. Likely to not happen.

Dr. Strange. Movie. Bob Gale is scripting.

Dominique Shade. New comics character in development for Marvel.

Donald Duck. Donald makes cameo appearances in animated syndicated TV series, *Duck Tales*.

Elektra. Movie scripted by L.M. Kit Carson & Jim McBride. McBride may direct.

Elfquest. Movie in limbo.

* **The Executioner**. Movie. Sylvester Stallone stars.

Fantastic Four. Movie in development with Neue Constantin.

The Far Side. Movie version of Gary Larson comic panel. To be directed by Alan Rudolph. Alive Films production.

Felix the Cat. Animated feature, mostly done in Hungary, for New World.

The Flash. Movie. First draft script by Jim Strain, from a story by Todd Holland. Viewed as unlikely at this point.

* **The Flintstones**. Movie scripted by Steven de Souza. To star Jim Belushi & Rick Moranis, debuts this fall on CBS (includes adaptations of Jim Davis' *U.S. Acres*). Movie, *Garfield's Judgment Day*, also planned.

The Greatest American Hero. An animated version in development at Stephen Cannell Entertainment.

* **The Green Hornet**. Movie. For Taft Entertainment/Keith Barish Productions.

Green Lantern. Rights nearly acquired by 20th Century Fox. Deal fell through.

Dolph Lundgren takes up heavy arms as *The Punisher*.

Punisher, Wolverine & Co. Art: Tim Lee/Trademark & Copyright 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group

Hagar the Horrible. Animated CBS special.

Heavy Metal. *Heavy Metal's Burning Chrome*, animated movie based on William Gibson story, in works.

* **He-Man**. Animated syndicated series continues.

* **The Incredible Hulk**. TV movie reunion with Bill Bixby, Jack Colvin & Lou Ferrigno, *The Incredible Hulk Returns*, aired in May with great ratings, so more TV-movies may follow. Animated Hulk segments part of *Marvel Universe* syndicated series.

Iron Man. Movie versions proposed.

The Jetsons. Movie long in development, Paramount. Gary Nardino, producer.

Jonny Quest. Syndicated animated series. Live-action movie to be written & directed by Fred Dekker. For Taft Entertainment/Keith Barish Productions.

Judge Dredd. Movie. Scripted by Tim Hunter & James Crumley. Hunter will direct.

* **Lone Wolf & Cub**. Another live-action film adaptation. Edward Pressman, producer. First was 1981's *Shogun Assassin*.

Luke Cage & Iron Fist. Movie in development. Being written by Michael Janover.

* **MAD Magazine**. CBS-TV special produced by Hanna-Barbera airs this season, incorporating animated versions of features like "Spy vs. Spy." Viewed as a series pilot.

* **Mandrake the Magician**. Movie, scripted by William Hjortsberg, considered dead.

Marvin. Half-hour animated CBS TV special.

* **Mighty Mouse**. CBS Saturday animated series, *Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures*, continues this fall for a second season. Ralph Bakshi, producer. Animated movie mulled.

* **Mindmaster**. New Jack Kirby comics character created for Empire movie unlikely.

Mr. Magoo. Movie. Steven Tisch, producer.

Motley's Crew. Sitcom TV pilot in development.

Neil the Horse. Animation/live-action project in development.

Beany & Cecil Art: Copyright 1988 Bob Clampett Productions

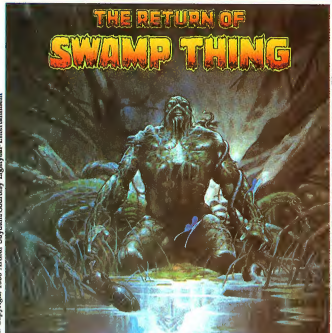
Swamp Thing: He's Marshy! He's Overgrown! He's Back!

Comicdom's walking vegetable plate Swamp Thing, created by Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, is back in the big-budget motion picture *The Return of Swamp Thing*. The sequel to Wes Craven's 1982 film was scheduled to wrap a five-week shooting schedule this month in Savannah, Georgia.

The Return of Swamp Thing, directed by Jim (*Not of This Earth*) Wynorski from a script by Neal Cuthburt and Grant Morris, finds Abigail (Heather Locklear), the stepdaughter of the earlier epic's Dr. Arcane (once again played by Louis Jourdan) returning to those dread swamps to put her relationship with her old man on the straight and narrow. Along the way, she discovers he's really a louse, falls in love with Swamp Thing (Dick Durock reprises the role whose stunt scenes he played the first time) and joins forces with Swampy to thwart Arcane and his mutant army's attempt to prolong his life through a mixture that involves the marsh monster's and Abigail's blood.

Michael Uslan, who with *Return*'s co-producer Benjamin Melniker also produced *Swamp Thing*, claims that *Return of Swamp Thing* will be true to the saga's comic-book spirit.

"This film is *definitely* along the lines of the [more recent] Alan Moore-Steve Bissette-John Totleben interpretation of Swamp Thing," explains Uslan. "The way Swamp Thing looks this time—big, hulking and overgrown—was inspired by Bissette and Totleben. The love scenes between Swamp Thing and Abigail are from the Moore period in the comic's history."



Art: Copyright 1988 Arthur Suydam/Courtesy Lightyear Entertainment

Swamp Thing returns—with Jim Wynorski as director and Louis Jourdan reprising his villainous role as Arcane.

On the FX front, such Arcane henchmen as the Unmen, Leech Thing and Roach Thing are being mastered by effects veteran Steve Neill. Carl (*FX*) Fullerton is handling the new and much improved Swamp Thing design, which, according to Uslan, "allows for a complete range of movement and facial emotions."

Director Wynorski wasn't available for comment at presstime, but he told the *Los Angeles Times*: "I hope to bring the sequel more into the comic-book realm with huge sets and lots of monsters."

Wynorski also claimed that the film's soundtrack would contain such swamp-oriented chestnuts as "Born on the Bayou" by Creedence Clearwater Revival and "Blue Bayou" by Roy Orbison.

Uslan says that any improvement in quality by *Return of Swamp Thing* over *Swamp Thing* is "primarily a matter of interpretation." But he gets more specific when it comes to clarifying the long-held belief that the first *Swamp Thing* stumbled into financial quicksand.

"The original *Swamp Thing* opened regionally and was doing very well," recalls Uslan. "Unfortunately, Avco Embassy [which released the film] had a front office shakeup right after the opening. The new regime decided they would do no more science-fiction, fantasy and horror films and immediately pulled all support from the film. That movie was on its way to being a sizable success when they pulled the plug."

However, Uslan went on to have the last laugh when *Swamp Thing* proved a ratings smash on the small screen.

"It was very successful on cable. Kids picked up on the movie and were watching it four to five times a month. Then, the film finally went into independent syndication. We figured it had been watched to death. But the ratings remained high.

"Video sales were also good," Uslan notes. "In fact, response to the movie was so good that both HBO and Showtime [cable TV concerns] had approached us about doing either a *Swamp Thing* movie for cable or a series.

But the big screen is where *Return of Swamp Thing* is ultimately scheduled to debut. No company has picked up distribution rights to the film and no release date has been determined. However, those uncertainties don't bother Michael Uslan.

"All we're interested in doing is getting the movie done. And then letting people see for themselves."

—*Marc Shapiro*

Swamp Thing Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1988 DC Comics Inc.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD. Movie in development with Paramount. Producers: Debra Hill & Lynn Obst.

Joe Palooka. Broadway musical in development. Rights holder exploring other options.

Peanuts. Animated TV specials continue with four new ones (including a live-action/animation combo).

* **The Phantom.** Movie. Bruce Sherlock, Peter Sjoquist, John Torv, Rodney Price, producers. Ken Shadie is scripting. *Phantom* creator Lee Falk is consulting. (see item).

* **Plastic Man.** Movie. Joe Dante to direct.

* **Popeye.** CBS Saturday animated series, *Popeye & Son*, cancelled.

The Protector. New comics character property developed by Marvel & Warner Bros.

* **The Punisher.** Movie. Dolph Lundgren stars. Script by Boaz Yakin. Mark Goldblatt, director. This $10 million film is shooting in Australia. Sequels planned.

Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman. In development at Warner Bros.

Rock City. Moebius SF musical short story is being expanded for live-action feature. Co-production between Starwatcher Graphics & the Maltese Companies.

The Rocketeer. Movie in development at Disney. Bill Dear will direct. Script by Danny Bilson & Paul De Meo.

* **Sgt. Rock.** Movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. Script by David Peoples. Joel Silver, producer. Filming begins this fall.

The Shadow. Movie. Scripted by Howard Franklin. Martin Bregman, producer.

The She-Hulk. Marvel Productions TV project with Viacom.

The Silver Surfer. Animated mini-series in development at New World.

* **Spider-Man.** Cannon Films version. Albert Pyun, director. (see article). Animated Spider-Man segments part of *Marvel Universe* syndicated series.

Sub-Mariner. Script by Joe Brancato & Ted Newsom.

* **Superboy.** Half-hour TV series from producers Alexander & Ilya Salkind. Slated for October debut.

Superman. Despite critical response to *Superman IV*, Cannon Films has announced a *Superman V* in "pre-production." *Not* viewed as a "certainty." An animated series from Ruby-Spears begins airing this fall on CBS Saturday mornings.

* **Swamp Thing.** Movie, *Return of Swamp Thing*, in production. Michael Uslan & Ben Melniker, producers. Jim Wynorski, director. (see item).

Tales from the Crypt. Cable series being piloted.

* **Thor.** Character is also in *The Incredible Hulk Returns*, functioning as a pilot spin-off for a *Thor* series. Animated series in development.

Tin-Tin. Movie still in development at Amblin Entertainment. "On the back burner."

* **Trouble with Girls.** In development at Godmother Filmworks.

Watchmen. Movie. Scripted by Sam Hamm. Producer, Joel Silver.

* **Whisper.** Movie. Being developed by Atlantic Releasing to star Vanity.

* **The Wizard of Id.** Movie. Script by Steven de Souza, Dana Olsen. David & Jerry Zucker to direct.

Wolverine. Movie in development. Script treatment by Chris Claremont.

The X-Men. Animated TV series pilot from New World.

Zippyvision. Movie scripted by Bill Griffith & Diane Noomin, featuring Zippy the Pinhead.

Zorro. Live-action, half-hour TV series, *Zorro—The Legend Continues*, in preparation co-produced by New World Enterprises & France's Ellipse Programme.

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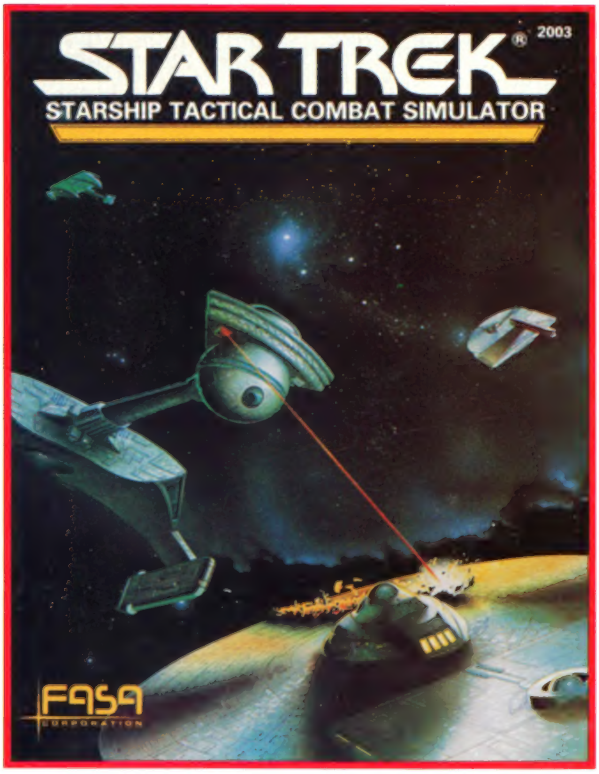

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